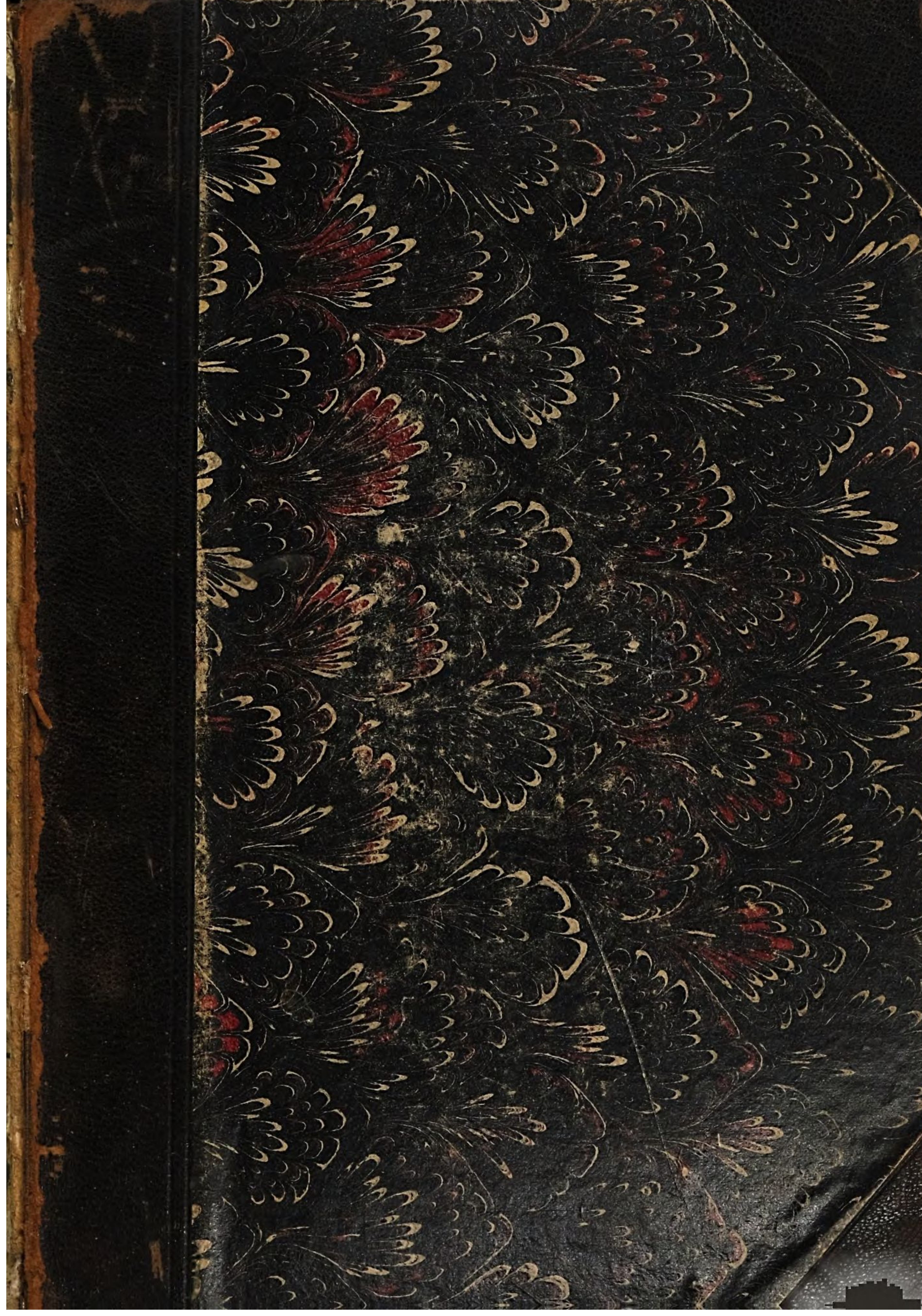




P. O. angl.
276^{sf}

Phillipotts

The English Library
NEW SERIES

Children
of the Mist

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

VOLUME II.

HEINEMANN AND BALESTIER, LTD.

LONDON AND LEIPZIG

PARIS

HACHETTE ET CIE.

*The Volumes of the English Library are published by arrangement with the Authors, and
enjoy Copyright in all Continental countries, but may not be introduced
into Great Britain, Ireland, or the British Colonies*

COMPLETE IN TWO VOLUMES

636 F

The English Library.

Each Volume sold separately.

PRICE 1 MARK 60 PFENNIG, OR 2 FRANCS.

NOW READY.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| 2. | The Light that Failed. By RUDYARD KIPPLING. | 1 vol. |
| 3. | Sidney. By MARGARET DELAND, Author of "John Ward, Preacher." | 2 vols. |
| 4. | April's Lady. By Mrs. HUNGERFORD. | 2 vols. |
| 5. | The Light of the World. By Sir E. ARNOLD, K.C.I.E., C.S.I. | 1 vol. |
| 6. | The Phantom Rickshaw. By RUDYARD KIPPLING. | 1 vol. |
| 7. | Urith. By S. BARING-GOULD. | 2 vols. |
| 8. | Marcia. By W. E. NORRIS. | 2 vols. |
| 9. | Brave Heart and True. By FLORENCE MARRYAT. | 2 vols. |
| 10. | Basil and Annette. By B. L. FARJEON. | 2 vols. |
| 11. | In the Heart of the Storm. By the Author of "The Silence of Dean Maitland." | 2 vols. |
| 12. | Tourmalin's Time Cheques. By F. ANSTEV. | 1 vol. |
| 13. | The Wages of Sin. By LUCAS MALET. | 2 vols. |
| 14. | The Anglomaniacs. By Mrs. BURTON HARRISON. | 1 vol. |
| 15. | My Face is my Fortune. By F. C. PHILIPS. | 1 vol. |
| 16. | St. Katherine's by the Tower. By WALTER BESANT. | 2 vols. |
| 17. | Eric Brighteyes. By H. RIDER HAGGARD. | 2 vols. |
| 18. | What Gold Cannot Buy. By Mrs. ALEXANDER. | 1 vol. |
| 19. | One of our Conquerors. By GEO. MEREDITH. | 2 vols. |
| 20. | A London Life. By HENRY JAMES. | 1 vol. |
| 21. | A Hardy Norseman. By EDNA LYALL. | 2 vols. |
| 22. | Pretty Miss Smith. By FLORENCE WARDEN. | 1 vol. |
| 23. | Derriek Vaughan, and The Autobiography of a Slander. By EDNA LYALL. | 1 vol. |
| 24. | The Mystery of No. 13. By HELEN MATHERS. | 1 vol. |
| 25. | A Little Irish Girl. By Mrs. HUNGERFORD. | 1 vol. |
| 26. | The Deemster. By HALL CAINE. | 2 vols. |
| 27. | The Shadow of a Dream. By W. D. HOWELLS. | 1 vol. |
| 28. | The Risen Dead. By FLORENCE MARRYAT. | 1 vol. |
| 29. | Mine Own People. By RUDYARD KIPPLING. | 1 vol. |
| 30. | A Window in Thrums. By J. M. BARRIE. | 1 vol. |
| 31. | Three Men in a Boat. By JEROME K. JEROME. | 1 vol. |
| 32. | The Splendid Spur. By "Q." | 1 vol. |
| 33. | With Essex in Ireland. By Hon. EMILY LAWLESS. | 1 vol. |
| 34. | A Humble Romance. By MARY E. WILKINS. | 1 vol. |
| 35. | Miss Wentworth's Idea. By W. E. NORRIS. | 1 vol. |
| 36. | The Mischief of Monica. By L. B. WALFORD. | 2 vols. |
| 37. | A Very Strange Family. By F. W. ROBINSON. | 1 vol. |
| 38. | An American Girl in London. By SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN. | 1 vol. |
| 39. | Her Last Throw. By Mrs. HUNGERFORD. | 1 vol. |
| 40. | The Scapegoat. By HALL CAINE. | 1 vol. |
| 41. | Intentions. By OSCAR WILDE. | 1 vol. |
| 42. | A Far-away Melody. By MARY E. WILKINS. | 1 vol. |
| 43. | The Sin of Olga Zassoulieh. By FRANK BARRETT. | 2 vols. |
| 44. | The English Poets. By JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL. | 1 vol. |
| 45. | Soldiers Three. By RUDYARD KIPPLING. | 1 vol. |
| 46. | According to St. John. By AMELIE RIVES. | 1 vol. |
| 47. | Mr. Chaine's Sons. By W. E. NORRIS. | 2 vols. |
| 48. | The New Rector. By STANLEY J. WEYMAN. | 1 vol. |
| 49. | The Mystery of M. Felix. By B. L. FARJEON. | 2 vols. |
| 50. | A Sydney-Side Saxon. By ROLF BOLDREWOOD. | 1 vol. |
| 51. | The Story of the Gadsbys. By RUDYARD KIPPLING. | 1 vol. |
| 52. | Hedda Gabler. A Drama. By HENRIK IBSEN. | 1 vol. |
| 53. | The Penance of Portia James. By TASMA. | 1 vol. |
| 54. | My Winter on the Nile. By CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER. | 2 vols. |
| 55. | Tuscan Cities. By W. D. HOWELLS. | 1 vol. |

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

NO. 10

CHILDREN OF THE MIST

WILLIAM H. HARRIS

NEW YORK

The English Library

No. 205

CHILDREN OF THE MIST

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

IN TWO VOLUMES

The English Library

No. 202



CHILDREN OF THE MIST

BY OTTO

IN TWO VOLUMES

CHILDREN OF THE MIST

A NOVEL

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF 'DOWN DARTMOOR WAY,' 'SOME EVERYDAY FOLKS,'
'MY LAUGHING PHILOSOPHER,' 'LYING PROPHETS,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME II

LEIPZIG

HEINEMANN AND BALESTIER

(*Ltd. London*)

1899

CHILDREN OF THE MIST

A NOVEL

BY EDEN PHILLIPOTS



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME II

LEIPZIG

HEINEMANN AND BARRETT

(Opp. London)

1899

CONTENTS

BOOK II (*continued*)

HIS ENTERPRISE

CHAP.	PAGE
XIII. THE WILL,	I
XIV. A HUNDRED POUNDS,	9
XV. 'THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK'	16
XVI. BEFORE THE DAWN,	28
XVII. MISSING,	44

BOOK III

HIS GRANITE CROSS

I. BABY,	49
II. THE KNIGHT OF FORLORN HOPES,	58
III. CONCERNING THE GATE-POST,	62
IV. MARTIN'S RAID,	72
V. WINTER,	83
VI. THE CROSS UPREARED,	90
VII. GREY TWILIGHT,	102

BOOK IV

HIS SECRET

CHAP.	PAGE
I. A WANDERER RETURNS,	111
II. HOPE RENEWED,	120
III. ANSWERED,	128
IV. THE END OF THE FIGHT,	134
V. TWO MIGHTY SURPRISES,	142
VI. THE SECRET OUT,	152
VII. SMALL TIMOTHY,	158
VIII. FLIGHT,	171
IX. UNDER COSDON BEACON,	180
X. BAD NEWS FOR BLANCHARD,	189
XI. PHOEBE TAKES THOUGHT,	201
XII. NEW YEAR'S EVE AND NEW YEAR'S DAY,	208
XIII. MR. LYDDON'S TACTICS,	223
XIV. ACTION,	232
XV. A BATTLE,	246
XVI. A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS,	256
XVII. SUSPENSE,	263
XVIII. THE NIGHT OF JUBILEE,	267

CHAPTER XIII

THE WILL

AGREEABLY to the prediction of Doctor Parsons, Mrs. Lezzard's journey was ended in less than three weeks of her conversation with Clement Hicks. Then came a night when she made an ugly end ; and with morning a group of gossips stood about the drawn blinds, licked their lips over the details, and generally derived that satisfaction from death common to their class. Indeed, this ghoulish gusto is not restricted to humble folk alone. The instinct lies somewhere at the root of human nature, together with many another morbid vein and trait not readily to be analysed or understood. Only educated persons conceal it.

'She had deliriums just at the end,' said Martha, her maid. 'She called out in a voice as I never heard afore, an' mistook her husband for the Dowl.'

'Poor sawl ! Death's such a struggle at the finish for the full-blooded kind. Doctor tawld me that if she'd had the leastest bit o' liver left, he could a saved her ; but 'twas all soaked up by neat brandy, leaving nought but a vacuum or some such fatal thing.'

'Her hadn't the use of her innards for a full fortnight ! Think o' that ! Aw, dallybuttons ! It do make me cream all awver to hear tell of !'

So they piled horror upon horror ; then came Clement Hicks, as one having authority, and bade them begone.

The ill-omened fowls hopped off; relations began to collect; there was an atmosphere of suppressed electricity about the place; and certain women openly criticised the prominent attitude Hicks saw fit to assume. This, however, did not trouble him. He wrote to the lawyer at Newton, fixed a day for the funeral, and then turned his attention to Mr. Lezzard. The ancient resented Clement's interference not a little, but Hicks speedily convinced him that his animosity mattered nothing. The beekeeper found this little taste of power not unpleasant. He knew that everything was his own property, and he enjoyed the hate and suspicion in the eyes of those about him. The hungry crowd haunted him, but he refused it any information. Mr. Lezzard picked a quarrel, but he speedily silenced the old man, and told him frankly that upon his good behaviour must depend his future position. Crushed and mystified, the widower whispered to those interested with himself in his wife's estate; and so before the reading of the will there slowly grew a very deep suspicion and hearty hatred of Clement Hicks. None had considered him in connection with Mrs. Lezzard's fortune, for he always kept aloof from her; but women cannot easily shut their lips over such tremendous matters of news, and so it came about that some whisper from Chris or dark utterance from old Mrs. Hicks got wind, and a rumour grew that the beekeeper was the dead woman's heir.

Facts contributed colour to the suspicion, for it was known that Clement had of late given Chris one or two pretty presents, and a ring that cost gold. His savings were suspected to justify no such luxuries; yet that a speedy change in his manner of life might be expected was also manifest from the fact that he had been looking into the question of a new stone

cottage, on the edge of the Moor, where the heather in high summer would ripple to the very doors of his bee-hives.

The distrust created by these facts was quickly set at rest, for Mrs. Lezzard sank under ground within four days of her dissolution; then, after the eating of funeral baked meats, those interested assembled in the parlour to hear the will. The crowd whispered and growled, and looked gloomily across at Hicks and the little figure of his mother who had come in rusty black to witness his triumph. Then a young lawyer from Newton adjusted his spectacles, rustled his papers, and poured himself out a glass of grocer's port before proceeding. But his task involved no strain upon him, and was indeed completed within five minutes. Black disappointment, dismay, and despair were the seeds sown by that unimpassioned voice; and at his conclusion a silence, as blank as any that reigned in the ears of the dead, fell upon those who listened to her handiwork—on those who had hoped so much and were confronted with so little.

'The Will is remarkably concise. Mrs. Lezzard makes sundry bitter statements which I think none will blame me for not repeating, though all may see them here who desire so to do; she then constitutes Mr. Clement Hicks, her nephew, sole residuary legatee. There is no condition, no codicil; but I have regretfully to add that Mr. Hicks wins little but this barren expression of goodwill from the testatrix—for the sufficient reason that she had nothing to leave. She laboured under various delusions, among others that her financial position was very different from what is the case. Upon her first husband's death, Mrs. Coomstock, as she was then, made an arrangement with my late senior partner, Mr. Joel Ford, and

purchased an annuity. This absorbed nearly all her capital; the rest she lost in an undesirable speculation of her own choosing. I am amazed at the present extent of her obligations. This dwelling-house, for instance, is mortgaged to her medical man, Doctor Parsons, of Chagford. There is barely money to meet the debts. Some fifty or sixty pounds in my hands will be absorbed by the calls of the estate. Mrs. Lezzard's tastes—I sorrow to say it—were expensive in some directions. There is an item of ten pounds twelve shillings for—for brandy, if I may be pardoned for speaking plainly. The funeral also appears to have been conducted on a scale more lavish than circumstances warranted. However, there should be sufficient to defray the cost, and I am sure nobody will blame Mr. Hicks for showing this last respect to an amiable if eccentric woman. There is nothing to add except that I shall be delighted to answer any questions—any questions at all.'

A few moments later, the lawyer mounted his dog-cart and rattled off to enjoy a pleasant drive homeward.

Then the company spoke its mind, and Mary Lezzard's clay might well have turned under that bitter hornet buzz of vituperation. Some said little, but had not strength or self-command to hide tears; some cursed and swore. Mr. Lezzard wept unheeded; Mrs. Hicks likewise wept. Clement sat staring into the flushed faces and angry eyes, neither seeing the rage manifested before him, nor hearing the coarse volleys of reproach. Then in his turn he attracted attention, and hard words, wasted on the dead, hurtled like hail round his ears, with acid laughter, and bitter sneers at his own tremendous awakening. Stung to the quick, the lame wheelwright, Charles Coomstock, gloated on the spectacle of Clement's dark hour, and

heaped abuse upon his round-eyed, miserable mother. The raw of his own wound found a sort of salve in this attack; and all the other poor, coarse creatures similarly found comfort in their disappointment from a sight of more terrific mortification than their own. Venomous utterances fell about Clement Hicks, but he neither heard nor heeded: his mind was far away with Chris, and the small shot of the Coomstocks and the thunder of the Chowns alike flew harmlessly past him. He saw his sweetheart's sorrow, and her grief, as yet unborn, was the only fact that much hurt him now. The gall in his own soul only began to sicken him when his eye rested on his mother. Then he rose and departed to his home, while the little, snuffling woman ran at his heels like a dog.

Not until he had escaped the tempest of voices, and was hidden from the world, did the beekeeper allow his own cruel disappointment to appear. Then, while his mother wept, he lifted up his voice and cursed God. As his relations had won comfort by swearing at him, so now he soothed his soul unconsciously in blasphemies. Then followed a silence, and his mother dared to blame him and remind him of an error.

'You wouldn't turn the bee-butts when she died, though I begged and prayed of 'e. Oh, if you'd awnly done what an auld woman, an' she your mother, had told 'e! Not so much as a piece of crape would 'e suffer me to tie 'pon 'em. An' I knawed all the while the hidden power o' bees.'

Presently he left her, and went to tell Chris. She greeted him eagerly, then turned pale and even terrified as she saw the black news in his face.

'Just a gull and laughing-stock for the gods again, that's all, Chris. How easily they fool us from their thrones, don't they? And our pitiful hopes and

ambitions and poor pathetic little plans for happiness shrivel and die, and strew their stinking corpses along the road that was going to be so gorgeous. The time to spill the cup is when the lip begins to tremble and water for it—not sooner—the gods know! And now all's changed—excepting only the memory of things done that had better been left undone.'

'But—but we shall be married at once, Clem?'

He shook his head.

'How can you ask it? My poor little all—twenty pounds—is gone on twopenny-halfpenny presents during the past week or two. It seemed so little compared to the fortune that was coming. It's all over. The great day is further off by twenty pounds than it was before that poor drunken old fool lied to me. Yet she didn't lie either; she only forgot; you can't swim in brandy for nothing.'

Fear, not disappointment, dominated the woman before him as she heard. Sheer terror made her grip his arm and scream to him hysterically. Then she wept wild savage tears and called to God to kill her quickly. For a time she parried every question, but an outburst so strangely unlike Chris Blanchard had its roots deeper than the crushing temporary disaster which he had brought with him. Clement, suspecting, importuned for the truth, gathered it from her, then passed away into the dusk, faced with the greatest problem that existence had as yet set him. Crushed, and crushed unutterably, he returned home oppressed with a biting sense of his own damnable fate. He moved as one distracted, incoherent, savage, alone. The glorious palace he had raised for his happiness crumbled into vast ruins; hope was dead and putrid; and only the results of wild actions, achieved on false assumptions, faced him. Now, rising out of his brief midsummer madness, the man saw a ghost; and he

greeted it with groan as bitter as ever wrung human heart.

Miller Lyddon sat that night alone until Mr. Blee returned to supper.

'Gert news! Gert news!' he shouted, while yet in the passage; 'sweatin' for joy an' haste, I be!'

His eyes sparkled, his face shone, his words tripped each other up by the heels.

'Be gormed if ban't a 'mazin' world! She've left nought—dammy—less than nought, for the house be mortgaged sea deep to Doctor, an' theer's other debts. Not a penny for nobody—nothin' but empty bottles—an' to think as I thought so poor o' God as to say theer weern't none! What a ramshackle plaace the world is!'

'No money at all? Mrs. Lezzard? It can't be,' declared Mr. Lyddon.

'But it is, by gum! A braave tantara 'mongst the fam'ly, I tell 'e! Not a stiver—all ate up in a 'nuity, an' her—artful limb!—just died on the last penny o' the quarter's payment. An' Lezzard left at the work'us door—poor auld zawk! An' him fourscore an' never been eggicated an' never larned nothin'!'

'To think it might have been your trouble, Blee!'

'That's it, that's it! That's what I be full of! Awnly for the watchin' Lard, I'd been fixed in the hole myself. Just picture it! Me a-cussin' o' Christ to blazes an' lettin' on theer wasn't no such Pusson; an' Him, wide awake, a-keepin' me out o' harm's way even arter the banns was called! Theer's a God for 'e! Watchin' day an' night to see as I comed by no harm! That's what 'tis to have laid by a tidy mort o' righteousness 'gainst a evil hour!'

'You'm well out of it, sure enough.'

'Ess, 'tis so. I misjudged the Lard shocking, an'

I'm man enough to up and say it, thank God. He was right an' I was wrong; an' lookin' back, I sees it. So I'll come back to the fold, like the piece of silver what was lost; an' theer'll be joy in heaven, as well theer may be. Burnish it all! I'll go along to church 'fore all men's eyes next Lard's Day ever is.'

'A gude thought tu. Religion's a sort of benefit society, if you look at it, an' the Church be the bank wheer us pays in subscriptions Sundays.'

'An' blamed gude interest us gets for the money,' declared Mr. Blee. 'Not but what I've drawed a bit heavy on my draft of late, along o' pretendin' to heathen ways an' thoughts what I never really held with; but 'tis all wan now an' I lay I'll soon set the account right, wi' a balance in my favour tu. Seein' how shameful I was used, ban't likely no gert things will be laid against me.'

'And auld Lezzard will go to the Union?'

'A very fittin' plaace for un, come to think on't. Awver-balanced for sheer greed of gawld he was. My! what a wild-goose chase! An' the things he've said to me! Not that I'd allow myself—awnly from common humanity I must see un an' let un know I bear no more malice than a bird on a bough.'

They drank, Billy deeper than usual. He was marvellously excited and cheerful. He greeted God like an old friend returned to him from a journey; and that night before retiring he stood stiffly beside his bed and covered his face in his hands and prayed a familiar prayer among his generation.

'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on,
Four cornders to my bed,
Four angels overspread—
Two tu foot, an' two tu head,
An' all to carry me when I'm dead.'

An' when I'm dead an' in my graave,
An' all my bones be rotten,
The greedy worms my flaish shall ate,
An' I shall be forgotten ;
For Christ's sake. Amen.'

Having sucked from repetition of this ancient twaddle exactly that sort of satisfaction the French or Roman peasant wins from babble of a dead language over beads, Billy retired with many a grunt and sigh of satisfaction.

'It do hearten the spirit to come direct to the Throne,' he reflected ; 'an' the wonder is how ever I could fare for near two year wi'out my prayers. Yet, though I got my monkey up an' let Jehovah slide, He knawed of my past gudeness, all set down in the Book o' Life. An' now I've owned up as I was wrong ; which is all even the saints can do ; 'cause Judgment Day, for the very best of us, will awnly be a matter o' owning up.'

CHAPTER XIV

A HUNDRED POUNDS

THE maddening recollection of things done wrought upon Clement Hicks until it bred in him a distracted frenzy and blinded his judgment. He lost all sense of proportion in his endeavour to come at a right course of action, and a mind long inclined towards one road, now readily drifted upon it. To recover the position had been quite possible, and there were not wanting those ready and eager to assist him ; but at this crisis in his fortune the man lost all power of reflection or self-control. The necessity for instant

action clamoured to him through daylight and darkness; delay drove him hourly into a hysterical condition approaching frenzy, and every road to escape save one appeared bolted and barred against him. But try as he might, his miseries could not be hidden, and Will Blanchard, among others, sympathised very heartily with the great disappointment that had now fallen upon Chris and her sweetheart. His sister's attitude had astonished both him and his mother. They fancied that Blanchards were made of sterner stuff; but Chris went down before the blow in a manner very unexpected. She seemed dazed and unable to recover from it. Her old, elastic spirit was crushed and a great sorrow looked from her eyes.

Neither Will nor her mother could rouse her, and so it came about that thinking how best he might play a brother's part, the master of Newtake decided on a notable deed and held that the hour for it must be delayed no longer. He debated the circumstance from every point of view, examined his accounts, inspected the exact figures represented by the remainder of his uncle's legacy and then broke the matter to Phœbe. To his mother he had already spoken concerning the intention, and she approved it, though without knowing particulars. Phœbe, however, happened to be quite as familiar with Will's affairs as Will himself, and while his determination to give Clement and Chris a hundred pounds was easily come at and most cheering to his heart, the necessity of breaking the news to his wife appeared not so easy or pleasant. Indeed, Will approached the task with some trepidation, for a recent event made it doubly difficult. They sat together one night, and he plunged into the matter.

"'Tis sad them two being kept apart like this," he said abruptly.

"'Tis so. Nobody feels it more'n me. Matters was

hard with us, and now they'm all smooth and the future seems fairly bright tu.'

'Very bright,' he said stoutly. 'The hay's best ever come off my ground, thanks to the manure from Monks Barton, an' look at the wurzels! Miller hisself said he've never seed a more promising crop high or low. An' the things be in prime kelter tu; an' better than four hunderd pound of uncle's money still left.'

'Long may it be left, I'm sure. 'Tis terrible work dipping into it, an' I looks at both sides of a halfpenny 'fore I spend it. Wish you would. You'm tu generous, Will. But accounts are that difficult.'

This was not the spirit of the hour, however.

'I was gwaine to say that out of all our happiness an' fortune we might let a little bubble awver for Chris—eh? She'm such a gude gal, an' you love her so dearly as what I do a'most.'

Phoebe read the project in a flash, but yet invited her husband to explain.

'What d'you mean?' she asked, distrustfully and coldly.

'I can see in your face you know well enough. That four hunderd odd pound. I've sometimes thought I should have given Chris a bit of the windfall when first it comed. But now—well, theer's this cruel coil falled on 'em. You know the hardness of waiting. 'Twould be a butivul thing to let 'em marry an' feel 'twas thanks to us.'

'You want to go giving them money?'

'Not "give" 'zactly. Us'll call it a loan, till the time they see their way clearer.'

Phoebe sighed and was silent for a while.

'Poor dears,' she said at length. 'I feel for 'em in my heart, same as you do; yet somehow it doan't look right.'

‘Not right, Phœbe?’

‘Not wise, then. Remember what you say the winters be up here—such dreary months with no money coming in and all gwaïne out to keep life in the things.’

‘’Tis a black, bitin’ business on the high farms—caan’t deny that.’

‘Money flies so.’

‘Then let some fly to a gude end. You knaw I’m a hard, keen man where other people be concerned most times.’

His wife laughed frankly, and he grew red.

‘Damn it, Phœbe, doan’t you take me like that else you’ll get the rough edge of my tongue. ’Tis for you to agree with what I’m pleased to say, not contradict it. I *be* a hard, keen man, and knaws the value of money as well as another. But Chris is my awn sister, an’ the long an’ the short is I’m gwaïne to give Clem Hicks a hunderd pound.’

‘Will! It’s not reasonable, it’s not fair—us working so hard an’—an’——’

‘They’m to have it any way.’

Her breath caught in a little, helpless gasp. Without a word she picked up the material in her hands, huddled it up, and thrust it across the table towards him. Then the passion faded out of his face, his eyes softened and grew dreamy, he smiled and rubbed his brown cheek with the flannel.

‘My awn, li’l clever woman, as have set about the fashioning of a bairn so soon! God bless ’e, an’ bless ’e, an’ be gude to ’e, an’ the wee thing coming!’

He put his arm round her and patted her hair and purred softly to her; whereupon she relented and kissed him.

‘You knaw best, Will dearie; you nearly allus knaw best; but your heart’s bigger’n your pocket—’

an' a li'l child do call so loud for the spendin' o' money.'

'Ay, I knaw, I knaw; 'tis a parent's plaace to stand up for his offspring through fire an' water; an' I reckon I won't be the worst faither as ever was either. I can mind the time when I was young myself. Stern but kind's the right rule. Us'll bring un up in the proper way, an' teach un to use his onderstandin' an' allus knuckle down 'fore his elders. To tell 'e truth, Phœbe, I've a notion I might train up a cheel better'n some men.'

'Yes, Will, I think so tu. But 'tis food an' clothes an' li'l boots an' such like comes first. A hunderd pounds be such a mort o' money.'

'Twill set 'em up in a fair way.'

'Fifty wouldn't hardly do, p'raps?'

'Hardly. I like to carry a job through clean an' vitty while I'm on it.'

'You've got such a big spirit.'

'As to that, money so spent ban't lost—'tis all in the fam'ly.'

'Of course 'tis a gude advertisement for you. Folks'll think you'm prosperin' an' look up to you more.'

'Well, some might, though I doan't 'zactly mean it like that. Yet the putting out o' three figures o' money must make neighbours ope their eyes. Not that I want anybody to knaw either.'

So, against her judgment, Phœbe was won over, and presently she and her husband made merry at prospect of the great thing contemplated. Will imitated Clement's short, glum, and graceless manner before the gift; Phœbe began to spend the money and plan the beekeeper's cottage when Chris should enter it as a bride; and thus, having enjoyed an hour of delight the most pure and perfect that can fall to human lot, the young couple retired.

Elsewhere defeat and desolation marked the efforts

of the luckless poet to improve his position. All thoughts drifted towards the Red House, and when, struggling from this dark temptation, he turned to Martin Grimbald rather than his brother, Fate crushed this hope also. The antiquary was not in Chagford, and Clement recollected that Martin had told him he designed some visits to the 'doom rings' of Iceland, and other contemporary remains of primeval man in Brittany and in Ireland. To find him at present was impossible, for he had left no address, and his house-keeper only knew that he would be out of England until the autumn.

Now the necessity for action gained gigantically upon Hicks, and spun a net of subtle sophistry that soon had the poor wretch enmeshed beyond possibility of escape. He assured himself that the problem was reduced to a mere question of justice to a woman. A sacrifice must be made between one whom he loved better than anything in the world, and one for whom he cared not at all. That these two persons chanced to be brother and sister was an unfortunate accident, but could not be held a circumstance strong enough to modify his determination. He had, indeed, solemnly sworn to Will to keep his secret, but what mattered that before this more crushing, urgent duty to Chris? His manhood cried out to him to protect her. Nothing else signified in the least; the future—the best that he could hope for—might be ashy and hopeless now; but it was with the immediate present and his duty that he found himself concerned. There remained but one grim way; and, through such overwhelming, shattering storm and stress as falls to the lot of few, he finally took it. To marry at any cost and starve afterwards if necessary, had been the more simple plan; and that course of action must have first occurred to any other man but this; to him, however, it did not occur. The

crying, shrieking need for money was the thing that stunned him and petrified him. Shattered and tossed to the brink of aberration, stretched at frightful mental tension for a fortnight, he finally succumbed, and told himself that his defeat was victory.

He wrote to John Grimbal, explained that he desired to see him on the morrow, and the master of the Red House, familiar with recent affairs, rightly guessed that Hicks had changed his mind. Excited beyond measure, the victor fixed a place for their conversation, and it was a strange one.

‘Meet me at Oke Tor,’ he wrote. ‘By an accident I shall be in the Taw Marshes to-morrow, and will ride to you some time in the afternoon.—J. G.’

Thus upon a day when Will Blanchard called at Mrs. Hicks’s cottage, Clement had already started for his remote destination on the Moor. With some unconscious patronage Will saluted Mrs. Hicks and called for Clement. Then he slapped down a flat envelope under the widow’s eyes.

‘Us have thought a lot about this trouble, mother, an’ Phœbe’s hit on as braave a notion as need be. You see, Clem’s my close friend again now, an’ Chris be my sister; so what’s more fittin’ than that I should set up the young people? An’ so I shall, an’ here’s a matter of Bank of England notes as will repay the countin’. Give ’em to Clem wi’ my respects.’

Then Will suffered a surprise. The little woman before him swelled and expanded, her narrow bosom rose; her thin lips tightened, and into her dim eyes there came pride and brightness. It was her hour of triumph, and she felt a giantess as she stood regarding the envelope and Will. Him she had never liked since his difference with her son concerning Martin Grimbal, and now, richer for certain news of that morning, she gloried to throw the gift back.

'Take your money again, bwoy. No Hicks ever wanted charity yet, least of all from a Blanchard. Pick it up; and it's lucky Clement ban't home, for he'd have said some harsh words, I'm thinking. Keep it 'gainst the rainy days up to Newtake. And it may surprise 'e to know that my son's worth be getting found out at last. It won't be so long 'fore he takes awver Squire Grimbal's farm to the Red House. What do 'e think o' that? He've gone to see un this very day 'bout it.'

'Well, well! This be news, and no mistake—gude news, tu, I s'pose. Jan Grimbal! An' what Clem doan't know 'bout farmin' I'll be mighty pleased to teach un, I'm sure.'

'No call to worry yourself; Clem doan't want no other right arm than his awn.'

'Chris shall have the money, then; an' gude luck to 'em both, say I.'

He departed, with great astonishment the main emotion of his mind. Nothing could well have happened to surprise him more, and now he felt that he should rejoice, but found it difficult to do so.

'Braave news, no doubt,' he reflected, 'an' yet, come to think on it, I'd so soon the devil had given him a job as Grimbal. Besides, to choose him! What do Clement know about farmin'? Just so much as I know 'bout verse-writin', an' no more.'

CHAPTER XV

'THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK'

PATCHES of mist all full of silver light moved like lonely living things on the face of the high Moor. Here they dispersed and scattered, here they approached

and mingled together, here they stretched forth pearly fingers above the shining granite, and changed their shapes at the whim of every passing breeze; but the tendency of each shining, protean mass was to rise to the sun, and presently each valley and coomb lay clear, while the cool vapours wound in luminous and downy undulations along the highest points of the land before vanishing into air.

A solitary figure passed over the great waste. He took his way northward and moved across Scorhill, leaving Wattern Tor to the left. Beneath its ragged ridges, in a vast granite amphitheatre, twinkled the cool birth-springs of the little Wallabrook, and the water here looked leaden under shade, here sparkled with silver at the margin of a cloud shadow, here shone golden bright amid the dancing heads of the cotton grass under unclouded sunlight. The mist wreaths had wholly departed before noon, and only a few vast mountains of summer gold moved lazily along the upper chambers of the air. A huge and solitary shadow overtook the man and spread itself directly about him, then swept onwards; infinite silence encompassed him; once from a distant hill-side a voice cried to him, where women and children moved like drab specks and gathered the ripe whortleberries that now wove purple into the fabric of the Moor; but he heeded not the cry; and other sound there was none save the occasional and mournful note of some lonely yellow-hammer perched upon a whin. Into the prevalent olive-brown of the heath there had now stolen an indication of a magic change at hand, for through the sober monotone crept a gauzy shadow, a tremor of wakening flower-life, half pearl, half palest pink, yet more than either. Upon the immediate foreground it rippled into defined points of blossom, which already twinkled through all the dull foliage; in the middle

distance it faded; afar off it trembled as a palpable haze of light under the impalpable reeling of the summer air. A week or less would see the annual miracle performed again and witness that spacious and solemn region in all the amethystine glories of the ling. Fiercely hot grew the day, and the distances, so distinct through mist rifts and wreaths in the clearness of early morning, now retreated—mountain upon mountain, wide waste on waste—as the sun climbed to the zenith. Detail vanished, the Moor stretched shimmering to the horizon, only now and again from some lofty point of his pilgrimage did the traveller discover chance cultivation through a dip in the untamed region he traversed. Then, to the far east and north, the map of fertile Devon billowed and rolled in one enormous misty mosaic, billowed and rolled all opalescent under the dancing atmosphere and July haze, rolled and swept to the sky-line, where, huddled by perspective into the appearance of density, hung long silver tangles of infinitely remote and dazzling cloud against the blue.

From that distant sponge in the central waste, from Cranmere, mother of moorland rivers, the man presently noted wrinkles of pure gold trickling down a hill-side two miles off. Here sunshine touched the river Taw, still an infant thing not far advanced on the journey from its fount; but the play of light upon the stream, invisible save for this finger of the sun, indicated to the solitary that he approached his destination. Presently he stood on the side of lofty Steeperton and surveyed that vast valley known as Taw Marsh, which lies between the western foothills of Cosdon Beacon and the Belstone Tors to the north. The ragged manes of the latter hills wind through the valley in one lengthy ridge, and extend to a tremendous castellated mass of stone, by name Oke Tor.

This erection, with its battlements and embrasures,

outlying scarps and counterscarps, remarkably suggests the deliberate and calculated creation of man. It stands upon a little solitary hill at the head of Taw Marsh, and wins its name from the East Okement river which runs through the valley on its western flank. Above wide fen and marsh it rises, yet seen from Steeperton's vaster altitude, Oke Tor looks no greater than some fantastic child castle built by a Brobdingnagian baby with granite bricks. Below it on this July day the waste of Bogland was puckered with brown tracts of naked soil, and seamed and scarred with peat-cuttings. Here and there drying turves were propped in pairs and dotted the hill-sides; emerald patches of moss jewelled the prevailing sobriety of the valley; a single curlew, with rising and falling crescendos of sound, flew here and there under needless anxiety; and far away on White Hill and the enormous breast of Cosdon glimmered grey stone ghosts from the past—track-lines and circles and pounds—the work of those children of the mist who laboured here when the world was younger, whose dust now lay under the newborn light of the budding heath. White specks dotted the undulations where flocks roamed free; in the marsh red cattle sought pasture, and now was heard the jingle-jangle of a sheep-bell, and now the cry of bellowing kine.

Like a dark incarnation of suffering over this expansive scene passed Clement Hicks to the meeting with John Grimbal. His unrest was accentuated by the extreme sunlit peace of the Moor, and as he sat on Steeperton and gazed with dark eyes into the marshes below, there appeared in his face the battlefield of past struggles, the graves of past hopes. A dead apathy of mind and muscle succeeded his mental exertion and passion of thought. Increased age marked him, as though Time, thrusting all at once upon him bitter

experiences, usually spread over many years of a man's life, had weighed him down, humped his back, and thinned his hair and furrowed his forehead under the load. Within his eyes, behind the reflected blue of the sky, as he raised them to it, sat mad misery; and an almost tetanic movement of limb, which rendered it impossible for him to keep motionless even in his present recumbent position, denoted the unnatural excitation of his nerves. The throb and spasm of the past still beat against his heart. Like a circular storm in mid-ocean, he told himself that the tempest had not wholly ended, but might reawaken, overwhelm him, and sweep him back into the turmoil again. As he thought, and his eye roved for a rider on a brown horse, the poor wretch was fighting still. Yesterday, fixed determination marked his movements, and his mind was made up; to-day, after a night not devoid of sleep, it seemed that everything that was best in him had awakened refreshed, and that each mile of the long tramp across Dartmoor had represented another battle fought with his fate. Justice, justice for himself and the woman he loved, was the cry raised more than once aloud in sharp agony on that great silence. And only the drone of the shining winged things and the dry rustle of the grasshoppers answered him.

Like the rest of the sore-smitten and wounded world he screamed to the sky for Justice, and like the rest of the world forgot or did not know that Justice is only a part of Truth, and therefore as far beyond man's reach as Truth itself. Justice can only be conceived by humanity, and that man should even imagine any abstraction so glorious is wonderful, and to his credit. But Justice lies not only beyond our power to mete to our fellows; it forms no part of the Creator's methods with us or this particular mote in the beam of the Universe. Man has never received Justice, as he

understands it, and never will; and his own poor, flagrant, fallible travesty of it, erected to save him from himself, and called Law, more nearly approximates to Justice than the treatment which has ever been apportioned to humanity. Before this eternal spectacle of illogical austerity, therefore, man, in self-defence and to comfort his craving and his weakness, has clung to the cheerful conceit of immortality, has pathetically credited the First Cause with a grand ultimate intention concerning each suffering atom, has assured himself that eternity shall wipe away all tears and blood, shall reward the actors in this puppet-show with golden crowns and nobler parts in a nobler playhouse. Human dreams of justice are responsible for this yearning towards another life, not the dogmas of religion; and the conviction undoubtedly has to be thanked for much individual right conduct; but it happens that an increasing number of intellects can find solace in these theories no longer; it happens that the liberty of free thought (which is the only liberty man may claim) will not longer be bound with these puny chains. Many detect no just argument for a future life; they admit that adequate estimate of abstract Justice is beyond them; they suspect that Justice is a human conceit; and they see no cause why its attributes should be credited to the Creator in His dealings with the created, for the sufficient reason that Justice has never been consistently exhibited by Him. The natural conclusion of these opinions need not be pursued here. Suffice it that, taking their stand on pure reason, such thinkers deny the least evidence of any life beyond the grave; to them, therefore, this ephemeral progression is the beginning and the end, and they live every precious moment with a yearning zest beyond the power of conventional intellects to conceive.

Of such was Clement Hicks. And yet in this dark

hour he cried for Justice, not knowing to Whom or to What he cried. Right judgment was dead at last. He rose and shook his head in mute answer to the voices still clamouring to his consciousness. They moaned and reverberated and mingled with the distant music of the bell-wether, but his mind was made up irrevocably now; he had determined to do the thing he had come to do. He told himself nothing much mattered any more; he laughed as he rose and wiped the sweat off his face, and passed down Steeperton through débris of granite. 'Life's only a breath and then Nothing,' he thought; 'but it will be interesting to see how much more bitterness and agony those that pull the strings can cram into my days. I shall watch from the outside now.' A man is never happy so long as he takes a personal interest in life. Henceforth I'll stand outside and care no more and laugh and laugh on through the years. We're greater than the Devil that made us; for we can laugh at all his cursed cruelty—we can laugh, and we can die laughing, and we can die when we please. Yes, that's one thing he can't do—torment us an hour more than we choose.'

Suicide was always a familiar thought with this man, but it had never been further from his mind than of late. Cowardly in himself, his love for Chris Blanchard was too great to suffer even the shadow of self-slaughter to tempt him at the present moment. What might happen in the future, he could not tell; but while her happiness was threatened and her life's welfare hung in the balance, his place was by her side. Then he looked into Will Blanchard's future and asked himself what was the worst that could result from his pending treachery. He did not know, and wished time had permitted him to make inquiries. But his soul was too weary to care. He only longed for the ordeal to be ended; his aching eyes, now bent on his temporal

environment, ranged widely for the spectacle of a rider on a brown horse.

A red flag flapped from a lofty pole at the feet of Steeperton, but Hicks, to whom the object and its significance were familiar, paid no heed and passed on towards Oke Tor. On one side the mass rose gradually up by steps and turrets; on the other the granite beetled into a low cliff springing abruptly from the turf. Within its clefts and crannies there grew ferns, and to the north-east, sheltered under ledges from the hot sun, cattle and ponies usually stood or reclined upon such a summer day as this, and waited for the oncoming cool of evening before returning to pasture.

On the present occasion, however, no stamp of hoof, snort of nostril, whisk of tail and hum of flies denoted the presence of beasts. For some reason they had been driven elsewhere. Clement climbed the Tor, then stood upon its highest point, and turning his back to the sun, scanned the wide rolling distances over which he had tramped and sought fruitlessly for an approaching horseman. But no particular hour had been specified, and he knew not and cared not how long he might have to wait.

In a direction quite contrary to that on which the eyes of Hicks were set, sat John Grimbald upon his horse, and talked with another man. They occupied a position at the lowermost end of Taw Marsh, beneath the Belstones; and they watched some seventy artillerymen busily preparing for certain operations of a nature to specially interest the master of the Red House. Indeed, the pending proceedings had usually occupied his mind to total exclusion of all other affairs; but to-day even more momentous events awaited him in the immediate future, and he looked from his companion along the great valley to where Oke Tor

appeared, shrunk to a mere grey stone at the further end.

Of John Grimbals life it may now be said that it drifted into a confirmed and bitter misogyny. He saw no women, spoke of the sex with disrespect, and chose his few friends among men whose sporting and warlike instincts chimed with his own. Sport he pursued with dogged pertinacity, but the greater part of his leisure was devoted to the formation of a yeomanry corps at Chagford, and in this design he made good progress. He still kept his wrongs sternly before his mind, and when the old bitterness began to grow blunted, deliberately sharpened it again, strangling alike the good work of time and all emotions of rising contentment and returning peace. Where was the wife whose musical voice and bright eyes should welcome his daily homecoming? Where were the laughing and pattering-footed little ones? Of these priceless treasures the man on the Moor had robbed him. His great house was empty and cheerless. Thus he could always blow the smouldering fires into active flame by a little musing on the past; but how long it might be possible to sustain his passion for revenge under this artificial stimulation of memory remained to be seen. As yet, at any rate, the contemplation of Will Blanchard's ruin was good to Grimbals, and the accident of his discovery that Clement Hicks knew some secret facts to his enemy's disadvantage, served vastly to quicken the lust for a great revenge. From the first he had determined to drag Clement's secret out of him sooner or later, and had, until his recent offer of the Red House Farm, practised remarkable patience. Since then, however, a flicker of apparent prosperity which overtook the beekeeper appeared to diminish Grimbals chances perceptibly; but with the sudden downfall of Clement's hopes the other's ends grew

nearer again, and at the last it had scarcely surprised him to receive the proposal of Hicks. So now he stood within an hour or two of the desired knowledge, and his mind was consequently a little abstracted from the matter in hand.

The battery, consisting of four field guns, was brought into action in the direction of the upper end of the valley, while Major Tremayne, its commanding officer and John Grimbal's acquaintance, explained to the amateur all that he did not know. During the previous week the master of the Red House and other officers of the local yeomanry interested in military matters had dined at the mess of those artillery officers then encamped at Okehampton for the annual practice on Dartmoor; and the outcome of that entertainment was an invitation to witness some shooting during the forthcoming week.

The gunners in their dark blue uniforms swarmed busily round four shining sixteen-pounders, while Major Tremayne conversed with his friend. He was a handsome, large-limbed man, with kindly eyes.

'Where's your target?' asked Grimbal as he scanned the deep distance of the valley.

'Away there under that grey mass of rock. We've got to guess at the range as you know; then find it. I should judge the distance at about two miles—an extreme limit. Take my glass and you'll note a line of earthworks thrown up on this side of the stone. That is intended to represent a redoubt, and we're going to shell it and slay the dummy men posted inside.'

'I can see without the glass. The rock is called Oke Tor, and I'm going to meet a man there this afternoon.'

'Good, then you'll be able to observe the results at close quarters. They'll surprise you. Now we are

going to begin. Is your horse all right? He looks shifty, and the guns make a devil of a row.'

'Steady as time. He's smelt powder before to-day.'

Major Tremayne now adjusted his field-glasses, and carefully inspected distant earthworks stretched below the northern buttresses of Oke Tor. He estimated the range, which he communicated to the battery; then after a slight delay came the roar and bellow of the guns as they were fired in slow succession.

But the Major's estimate proved too liberal, for the ranging rounds fell far beyond the target, and dropped into the lofty side of Steeperton.

The elevation of the guns was accordingly reduced, and Grimbald noted the profound silence in the battery as each busy soldier performed his appointed task.

At the next round shells burst a little too short of the earthworks, and again a slight modification in the range was made.

Now missiles began to descend in and around the distant redoubt, and each as it exploded dealt out shattering destruction to the dummy men which represented an enemy. One projectile smashed against the side of Oke Tor, and sent back the ringing sound of its tremendous impact.

Subsequent practice, now that the range was found, produced results above the average in accuracy, and Major Tremayne's good humour increased.

'Five running plump into the redoubt! That's what we can do when we try,' he said to Grimbald, while the amateur awarded his meed of praise and admiration.

Anon the business was at an end; the battery limbered up; the guns, each drawn by six stout horses, disappeared with many a jolt over the uneven ground, as the soldiers clinked and clashed away to their camp on the high land above Okehampton.

Under the raw smell of burnt powder Major

Tremayne took leave of Grimbald and the rest; each man went his way; and John, pursuing a bridle-path through the marshes of the Taw, proceeded slowly to his appointment.

An unexpected spring retarded Grimbald's progress and made a considerable detour necessary. At length, however, he approached Oke Tor, marked the tremendous havoc of the firing, and noted a great grey splash upon the granite, where one shell had abraded its weathered face.

John Grimbald dismounted, tied up his horse, then climbed to the top of the Tor, and searched for an approaching pedestrian. Nobody was visible save one man only; a mounted soldier riding round to strike the red warning flags posted widely about the ranges. Grimbald descended and approached the southern side, there to sit on the fine intermingled turf and moss, and smoke a cigar until his man should arrive. But rounding the point of the low cliff, he found that Hicks was already there.

Clement, his hat off, reclined upon his back with his face lifted to the sky. Where his head rested, the wild thyme grew, and one great, black humble-bee boomed at a deaf ear as it clumsily struggled in the purple blossoms. He lay almost naturally, but some distortion of his neck, and a film upon his open eyes proclaimed that the man neither woke nor slept.

The lonely death of him was on this wise. Standing at the edge of the highest point of Oke Tor, with his back to the distant guns, he had crowned the artillerymen's target, himself invisible. At that moment firing began, and the first shell, suddenly shrieking scarcely twenty yards above his head, had caused Hicks to start and turn abruptly. With this action he lost his balance; then a projection of the granite struck his back as he fell and brought him heavily to the earth upon his head.

Now the sun, creeping westerly, already threw a ruddiness over the Moor, and this warm light touching the dead man's cheek brought thither a hue never visible in life, and imparted to the features a placidity very startling by contrast with the circumstances of his sudden and violent end.

CHAPTER XVI

BEFORE THE DAWN

It proclaims the attitude of John Grimal to his enemy that thus suddenly confronted with the corpse of a man whom he believed in life, his first emotion should have betokened bitter disappointment and even anger. Will Blanchard's secret, great or small, was safe enough for the present; and the hand stretched eagerly for revenge clutched air.

Convincing himself that Hicks was dead, Grimal galloped off towards Belstone village, the nearest centre of civilisation. There he reported the facts, directed police and labourers where to find the body and where to carry it, and subsequently rode swiftly back to Chagford. Arrived at the market-place, he acquainted Abraham Chown, the representative of the Devon constabulary, with his news, and finally writing a brief statement at the police station before leaving it, Grimal returned home.

Not until after dark was the impatient mother made aware of her son's end, and she had scarcely received the intelligence before he came home to her—with no triumphant news of the Red House Farm, but dead, on a sheep-hurdle. Like summer lightning Clement's fate leapt through the length and breadth of Chagford. It

penetrated to the vicarage ; it reached outlying farms ; it arrived at Monks Barton, was whispered near Mrs. Blanchard's cottage by the Teign, and, in the early morning of the following day, reached Newtake.

Then Will, galloping to the village while dawn was yet grey, met Doctor Parsons, and heard the truth of these uncertain rumours which had reached him.

'It seems clear enough when Grimbals's statement comes to be read,' explained the medical man. 'He had arranged a meeting with poor Hicks on Oke Tor, and, when he went to keep his appointment, found the unfortunate man lying under the rocks quite dead. The spot, I must tell you, was near a target of the soldiers at Okehampton, and John Grimbals first suspected that Hicks, heedless of the red warning flags, had wandered into the line of fire and been actually slain by a projectile. But nothing of that sort happened. I have seen him. The unfortunate man evidently slipped and fell from some considerable height upon his head. His neck is dislocated and the base of the skull badly fractured.'

'Have you seen my poor sister?'

'I was called last night while at Mrs. Hicks's cottage, and went almost at once. It's very terrible—very. She'll get brain fever if we're not careful. Such a shock. She was walking alone, down in the croft by the river—all in a tremendously heavy dew too. She was dry-eyed and raved, poor girl. I may say she was insane at that sad moment. "Weep for yourself!" she said to me. "Let this place weep for itself, for there's a great man has died. He was here and lived here and nobody knew—nobody but his mother and I knew what he was. He had to beg his bread almost, and God let him ; but the sin of it is on those around him—you and the rest." So she spoke, poor child. These are not exactly her words, but something like them. I

got her indoors to her mother and sent her a draught. I've just come from confining Mrs. Woods, and I'll walk down and see your sister now before I go home if you like. I hope she may be sleeping.'

Will readily agreed to this suggestion; and together the two men proceeded to the valley.

But many things had happened since the night. When Doctor Parsons left Mrs. Blanchard, she had prevailed upon Chris to go to bed, and then herself departed to the village and sat with Mrs. Hicks for an hour. Returning, she found her daughter apparently asleep, and, rather than wake her, left the doctor's draught unopened; yet Chris had only simulated slumber, and as soon as her mother retreated to her own bed, she rose, dressed, crept from the house, and hastened through the night to where her lover lay.

The first awful stroke had fallen, but the elasticity of the human mind which at first throws off and off such terrible shocks, and only after the length of many hours finally accepts them as fact, saved Chris Blanchard from going mad. Happily she could not thus soon realise the truth. It recurred, like the blows of a sledge, upon her brain, but between these cruel reminders of the catastrophe, the knowledge of Clement's death escaped her memory entirely, and more than once, while roaming the dew alone, she asked herself suddenly what she was doing and why she was there. Then the mournful answer knelled to her heart, and the recurrent spasms of that first agony slowly, surely settled into one dead pain, as the truth was seared into her knowledge. A frenzied burst of anger succeeded, and under its influence she spoke to Doctor Parsons, who approached her beside the river and with tact and patience at length prevailed upon her to enter her home. She cursed the land that had borne him, the hamlet wherein he had dwelt; and her mother, not amazed at her fierce grief,

found each convulsive ebullition of sorrow natural to the dark hour, and soothed her as best she could. Then the elder woman departed awhile, not knowing the truth and feeling such a course embraced the deeper wisdom.

Left alone, her future rose before Chris, as she sat upon her bed and saw the time to come glimmer out of the night in colours more ashy than the moonbeams on the cotton blind. Yet, as she looked, her face burned, and one flame, vivid enough, flickered through all the future: the light on her own cheeks. Her position as it faced her from various points of view acted upon her physical being, suffocated her and brought a scream to her lips. There was nobody to hear it, nobody to see the girl tear her hair, rise from her couch, fall quivering, face downward, on the little strip of carpet beside her bed. Who could know even a little of what this meant to her? Women had often lost the men they loved, but never, never like this. So she assured herself. Past sorrows and fears dwindled to mere shadows now; for the awful future—the crushing months to come, rose grim and horrible on the horizon of Time, laden with greater terrors than she could face and live.

Alone, Chris told herself she might have withstood the on-coming tribulation, struggled through the storms of suffering and kept her broken heart company as other women had done before and must again; but she would not be alone. A little hand was stretching out of the loneliness she yearned for; a little voice was crying out of the solitude she craved. The shadows that might have sheltered her were full of hard eyes; the secret places would only echo a world's cruel laughter now—that world which had let her loved one die uncared-for, that world so pitiless to such as she. Her thoughts were alternately defiant and fearful; then, before the picture of her mother and Will, her

emotions dwindled from the tragic and became of a sort that weeping could relieve. Tears, now mercifully released from their fountains, softened her bruised soul for a time and moderated the physical strain of her agony. She lay long, half-naked, sobbing her heart out. Then came the mad desire to be back with Clement at any cost, and profound pity for him overwhelmed her mind to the exclusion of further sorrow for herself. She forgot herself wholly in grief that he was gone. She would never hear him speak or laugh again; never again kiss the trouble from his eyes; never feel the warm breath of him, the hand-grip of him. He was dead; and she saw him lying straight and cold in a padded coffin, with his hands crossed and cere-cloth stiffly tying up his jaws. He would sink into the silence that dwelt under the roots of the green grass; while she must go on and fight the world, and in fighting it, bring down upon his grave bitter words and sharp censures from the lips of those who did not understand.

Before which reflection Death came closer and looked kind; and the thought of his hand was cool and comforting, as the hand of a grey moor mist sweeping over the heath after fiery days of cloudless sun. Death stood very near and beckoned at the dark portals of her thought. Behind him there shone a great light, and in the light stood Clem; but the Shadow filled all the foreground. To go to her loved one, to die quickly and take their mutual secret with her, seemed a right and a precious thought just then; to go, to die, while yet he lay above the earth, was a determination that had even a little power to solace her agony. She thought of meeting him standing alone, strange, friendless on the other side of the grave; she told herself that actual duty, if not the vast love she bore him, pointed along the unknown road he

had so recently followed. It was but justice to him. Then she could laugh at Time and Fate and the juggling unseen Controller who had played with him and her, had wrecked their little lives, forced their little passions under a sham security, then snapped the thread on which she hung for everything, killed the better part of herself and left her all alone without a hand to shield or a heart to pity. In the darkness, as the moon stole away and her chamber window blackened, she sounded all sorrow's wide and solemn diapason; and the living sank into shadows before her mind's accentuated and vivid picture of the dead. Future life loomed along one desolate pathway that led to pain and shame and griefs as yet untasted. The rocks beside the way hid shadowy shapes of the unfriendly; for no mother's kindly hand would support her, no brother's stout arm would be lifted for her when they knew. No pure, noble fellow-creature might be asked for aid, not one might be expected to succour and cherish in the great strait sweeping towards her. Some indeed there were to look to for the moment, but their voices and their eyes would harden presently when they knew.

She told herself they must never know; and the solution to that problem of how to keep her secret appeared upon the threshold of the unknown road her lover had already travelled. Now, at the echo of the lowest notes, while she lay with uneven pulses and shaking limbs, it seemed that she was faced with the parting of the ways and must make instant choice. Time would not wait for her and cared nothing whether she chose life or death for her road. She struggled with red thoughts, and fever burnt her lips and stabbed her forehead. Clement was gone. In this supreme hour no fellow-creature could fortify her courage or direct her tottering judgment. Once she

thought of prayer and turned from it shuddering with a passionate determination to pray no more. Then the vision of Death shadowed her and she felt his brief sting would be nothing beside the endless torment of living. Dangerous thoughts developed quickly in her and grew to giants. Something clamoured to her and cried that delay, even of hours, was impossible and must be fatal to secrecy. A feverish yearning to get it over, and that quickly, mastered her, and she began huddling on some clothes.

Then it was that the sudden sound of the cottage door being shut and bolted reached her ear. Mrs. Blanchard had returned, and knowing that she would approach in a moment, Chris flung herself on the bed and pretended to be sleeping soundly. It was not until her mother withdrew and herself slumbered half an hour later that the distracted woman arose, dressed herself, and silently left the house as we have said.

She heard the river calling to her, and through its murmur sounded the voice of her loved one from afar. The moon shone clear and the valley was full of vapoury gauze. A wild longing to see him once more in the flesh before she followed him in the spirit gained upon Chris, and she moved slowly up the hill to the village. Then, as she went, born of the mists upon the meadows, and the great light and the moony gossamers diamonded with dew, there rose his dear shape and moved with her along the way. But his face was hidden, and he vanished at the first outposts of the hamlet as she passed into Chagford alone. The cottage shadows fell velvety black in a shining silence; their thatches were streaked, their slates meshed with silver; their whitewashed walls looked strangely awake and alert and surrounded the woman with a sort of blind, hushed stare. One solitary patch of light peered like a weary eye from that side of the

street which lay in shadow, and Chris, passing through the unbolted cottage door, walked up the narrow passage within and softly entered.

Condolence and tears and buzz of sorrowful friends had passed away with the stroke of midnight. Now Mrs. Hicks sat alone with her dead and gazed upon his calm features and vaguely wondered how, after a life of such disappointment and failure and bitter discontent, he could look so peaceful. She knew every line that thought and trouble had ruled upon his face; she remembered their coming; and now, between her fits of grief, she scanned him close and saw that Death had wiped away the furrows here and there, and smoothed his forehead and rolled back the years from off him until his face reminded her of the strange, wayward child who was wont to live a life apart from his fellows, like some wild wood creature, and who had passed almost friendless through his boyhood. Fully he had filled her widowed life, and been at least a loving child, a good son. On him her withered hopes had depended, and, even in their darkest hours, he had laughed at her dread of the workhouse, and assured her that while head and hands remained to him she need not fear, but should enjoy the independence of a home. Now this sole prop and stay was gone—gone, just as the black cloud had broken and Fate relented.

The old woman sat beside him stricken, shrivelled, almost reptilian in her red-eyed, motionless misery. Only her eyes moved in her wrinkled, brown face, and reflected the candle standing on the mantelpiece above his head. She sat with her hands crooked over one another in her lap, like some image wrought of ebony and dark oak. Once a large house-spider suddenly and silently appeared upon the sheet that covered the breast of the dead. It flashed along for a foot or two,

then sat motionless; and she, whose inclination was to loathe such things unutterably, put forth her hand and caught it without a tremor and crushed it while its hairy legs wriggled between her fingers.

To the robbed mother came Chris, silent as a ghost. Only the old woman's eyes moved as the girl entered, fell down by the bier and buried her face in the pillow that supported her lover's head. Thus, in profound silence, both remained awhile until Chris lifted herself and looked in the dead face and almost started to see the strange content stamped on it.

Then Mrs. Hicks began to speak in a high-pitched voice which broke now and again as her bosom heaved after past tears.

'The awnly son of his mother, an' she a widow wummon; and theer's no Christ now to work for the love of the poor. I be shattered wi' many groans an' tears, Chris Blanchard, same as you be. You knawed him—awnly you an' me; but you'm young yet, an' memory's so weak in young brains that you'll outlive it all an' forget.'

'Never, never, mother! Theer's no more life for me—not here. He's callin' to me—callin' an' callin' from yonder.'

'You'll outlive an' forget,' repeated the other. 'I cannot, bein' as I am. An', mind this, when you pray to Heaven, ax for gold an' diamonds, ax for houses an' lands, ax for the fat of the airth; an' ax loud. No harm in axin'. Awnly doan't pitch your prayers tu dirt low, for ban't the hardness of a thing stops God. You'm as likely or unlikely to get a big answer as a little. See the blessin' flowin' in streams for some folks! They do live braave an' happy, with gude health an' gude wives, an' money, an' the fruits of the land; they do get butivul childer, as grows up like the corners of the temple; an' when they come to die, they shut their

eyes 'pon kind faaces an' lie in lead an' oak under polished marble. All that be theer's; an' what was his—my son's?'

'God forgot him,' sobbed Chris, 'an' the world forgot him—all but you an' me.'

The old woman shifted her hands wearily.

'Theer's a mort for God to bear in mind, but 'tis hard, here an' there, wheer He slips awver some lowly party an' misses a humble whisper. Clamour if you want to be heard; doan't go with bated breath same as I done. 'Twas awnly a li'l thing I axed, an' axed it twice a day on my knees, ever since my man died twenty-three year ago. An' often as not thrice Sundays, so you may count up the number of times I axed if you mind to. Awnly a li'l rubbishy thing you might have thought: just to bring his fair share o' prosperity to Clem an' keep my bones out the poor-house at the end. But my bwoy's brawk his neck by a cruel death, an' I must wear the blue cotton.'

'No, no, mother.'

'Ess. Not that it looks so hard as it did. This makes it easy——' and she put her hand on her son's forehead and left it there a moment.

Presently she continued—

'I axed Clem to turn the bee-butts at my sister's passing—Mrs. Lezzard. But he wouldn't; an' now they'll be turned for him. Wise though the man was, he set no store on the dark, hidden meaning of honey bees at times of death. Now the creatures be masterless, same as you an' me; an' they'll knaw it; an' you'll see many an' many a-murmuring on his graave 'fore the grass graws green theer; for they see more 'n what we can.'

She relapsed into motionless silence and herself, now wholly tearless, watched the tears of Chris who had sunk down on the floor between the mother and son.

‘Why for do *you* cry an’ wring your hands so hard?’ she asked suddenly. ‘You’m awnly a girl yet—young an’ soft-cheeked wi’ braave bonny eyes. Theer’ll be many a man’s breast for you to comfort your head on. But me! Think o’ what’s tearin’ my auld heart to tatters—me, so bleared an’ ugly an’ lonely. God knaws God’s self couldn’t bring no balm to me—none, till I huddle under the airth arter un; but you—your wound won’t show by time the snaw comes again.’

‘You forget when you loved a man first if you says such a thing as that.’

‘Theer’s no eternal, lasting fashion o’ love but a mother’s to her awn male childer,’ croaked the other. ‘Sweethearts’ love is a thing o’ the blood—a trick o’ Nature to tickle us poor human things into breeding ’gainst our better wisdom; but what a mother feels doan’t hang on no such broken reed. It’s deeper down; it’s hell an’ heaven both to wance; it’s life; an’ to lose it is death. See! Essterday I’d a fought an’ screamed an’ took on like a gude un to be fetched away to the Union; but come they put him in the ground, I’ll go so quiet as a lamb.’

Another silence followed; then the aged widow pursued her theme, at first in the same dreary, cracked monotone, then deepening to passion.

‘I tell you a gude wife will do most anything for a husband an’ give her body an’ soul to un; but she expects summat in return. She wants his love an’ worship for hers; but a mother do give all—all—all—an’ never axes nothin’ for it. Just a kiss maybe an’ a brightening eye, or a kind word. That’s her pay, an’ better’n gwald tu. She’m purty nigh satisfied wi’ what would satisfy a dog, come to think on it. ’Tis her joy to fret an’ fume an’ pine o’ nights for un, an’ tire the A’mighty’s ear wi’ plans an’ suggestions for un; ay, an’ think an’ sweat an’ starve for un all times. ’Tis

her joy, I tell 'e, to smoothe his road, an' catch the brambles by his way an' let 'em bury their thorns in her flesh so he shaan't feel 'em; 'tis her joy to hear him babble of all his hopes an' delights; an' when the time comes she'll taake the maid of his heart to her awn, though maybe 'tis breakin' wi' fear that he'll forget her in the light of the young eyes. Ax your awn mother if what I sez ban't God's truth. We as got the bwoys be content wi' that little. We awnly want to help theer young shoulders wi' our auld wans, to fight for 'em to the last. We'll let theer wives have the love, we will, an' ax no questions an'—an' we'll break our hearts when the cheel's took out o' his turn—break our hearts by inches—same as I be doin' now.'

'An' doan't I love tu? Weern't he all the world to me, tu? Isn't my heart broken so well as yours?' sobbed Chris.

'Hear this, you wummon, as talks of a broken heart,' answered the elder almost harshly. 'Wait—wait till you'm the mother of a li'l man-cheel, an' see the shining eyes of un a-lookin' into yourn while your nipple's bein' squeezed by his naked gums an' you laugh at what you suffered for un, an' hug un to you. Wait till he'm grawed from baby to bwoy, from bwoy to man; wait till he'm all you've got left in the cold, starved winter of a sorrowful life; an' wait till he'm brought home to 'e like this here, while you've been sittin' laughin' to yourself an' countin' dream gawld. Then turn about to find the tears that'll comfort 'e an the prayers that'll soothe 'e and the God that'll lift 'e up; but you won't find 'em Chris Blanchard.'

The girl listened to this utterance and it filled her with a sort of weird wonder as at a revelation of heredity. Mrs. Hicks had ever been taciturn before her, and now this rapid outpouring of thoughts and phrases echoed like the very speech of the dead. Thus

had Clement talked, and the girl dimly marvelled without understanding. The impression passed, and there awoke in Chris a sudden determination to whisper to this bereaved woman what she could not even tell her own mother. A second thought had probably changed her intention, but she did not wait for any second thought. She acted on impulse, rose, put her arms round the widow and murmured her secret.

The other started violently and broke her motionless posture before this intelligence.

‘Christ! And he knawed—my son?’

‘He knawed.’

‘Then you needn’t whisper it. There’s awnly us three here.’

‘An’ no others must knaw. You’ll never tell—never. You swear that.’

‘Me tell. No, no. To think! Then theer’s real sorrow for you, tu, poor soul—real, gnawin’ sorrow tu. Differ’nt from mine, but real enough. Yet——’

She relapsed into a stonelike repose. No facial muscle moved, but the expression of her mind appeared in her eyes and there gradually grew a hungry look in them—as of a starving thing confronted with food. The realisation of these new facts took a long time. No action accompanied it; no wrinkle deepened; no line of the dejected figure lifted; but when she spoke again her voice had greatly changed and become softer and very tremulous.

‘Oh my dear God! ’twill be a bit of Clement! Had ’e thought o’ that?’

Then she rose suddenly to her feet and expression came to her face—a very wonderful expression wherein were blended fear, awe, and something of vague but violent joy—as though one suddenly beheld a loved ghost from the dead.

‘’Tis as if all of un weern’t quite lost! A li’l left—

a cheel of his! Wummon! You'm a holy thing to me—a holy thing evermore! You'm bearin' sunshine for your summer-time and my winter—if God so wills!'

Then she lifted up her voice and cried to Chris with a strange cry, and knelt down at her feet and kissed her hands and stroked them.

'Go to un,' she said leaping up; 'go to Clem, an' tell un, in his ear, that I knaw. It'll reach him if you whisper it. His soul ban't so very far aways yet. Tell un I knaw tu—you an' me. He'd glory that I knawed. An' pray henceforrard, as I shall, for a bwoy. Ax God for a bwoy—ax wi'out ceasin' for a son full o' Clem. Our sorrows might win to the Everlasting Ear this wance. But, for Christ's sake, ax like wan who has a right to, not fawning an' humble.'

The woman was transfigured as the significance of this news filled her mind. She wept before a splendid possibility. It fired her eyes and straightened her shrivelled stature. For a while her frantic utterances almost inspired Chris with the shadow of similar emotions; but another side of the picture knew no dawn. This the widow ignored—indeed it had not entered her head since her first comment on the confession. Now, however, the girl reminded her—

'You forget a little what this must be to me, mother.'

'Light in darkness.'

'I hadn't thought that; an' the gert world won't pity me, as you did when first I told you.'

'You ban't feared o' the world, be you? The world forgot un. 'Twas your awn word. What's the world to you, knawin' what you knaw? Do 'e want to be treated soft by what was allus hell-hard to him? Four-an'-thirty short years he lived, then the world began to ope its eyes to his paarts, an' awnly then—tu late, when the thread of his days was spun. What's the

world to you and why should you care for its word, Chris Blanchard?’

‘Because I am Chris Blanchard,’ she said. ‘I was gwaine to kill myself, but thought to see his dear face wance more before I done it. Now——’

‘Kill yourself! God’s mercy! ’Twill be killing Clem again if you do! You caan’t; you wouldn’t dare; theer’s black damnation in it an’ flat murder now. Hear me, for Christ’s sake, if that’s the awful thought in you: you’m God’s chosen tool in this—chosen to suffer an’ bring a bwoy in the world—Clem’s bwoy. Doan’t you see how ’tis? “Kill yourself”! How can ’e dream it? You’ve got to bring a bwoy, I tell ’e, to keep us from both gwaine stark mad. ’Twas foreordained he should leave his holy likeness. God’s truth! You should be proud ’stead o’ fearful—such a man as he was. Hold your head high an’ pray when none’s lookin’, pray through every wakin’ hour an’ watch yourself as you’d watch the case of a golden jewel. What wise brain will think hard of you for followin’ the chosen path? What odds if a babe’s got ringless under the stars or in a lawful four-post bed? Who married Adam an’ Eve? You was the wife of un’cordin’ to the first plan of the livin’ God; an’ if He changed His lofty mind when ’twas tu late, blame doan’t fall on you or the dead. Think of a baaby—his baaby under your breast! Think of meetin’ him in time to come wi’ another soul got in sheer love! Better to faace the people an’ let the bairn come to fulness o’ life than fly them an’ cut your days short an’ go into the next world empty-handed. Caan’t you see it? What would Clem say? He’d judge you hard—such a lover o’ li’l childer as him. ’Tis the first framework of an immortal soul you’ve got unfoldin’, like a rosebud hid in the green, an’ ban’t for you to nip that life for your awn whim an’ let the angels in

heaven be fewer by wan. You must live. An' the bwoy'll graw into a tower of strength for 'e—a tower of strength an' a glass belike wheer you'll see Clem rose again.'

'The shame of it. My mother and Will—Will who's a hard judge, an' such a clean man.'

'“Clean!” Christ A'mighty! You'd madden a saint of heaven! Weern't Clem clean tu? If God sends fire—fire breaks out—sweet livin' fire. You must go through with it—ay, an' call the bwoy Clem tu. Be you shamed of him as he lies here? Be you feared of anything the airth can do to you when you look at him? Do 'e think Heaven's allus hard? No, I tell 'e, not to the young—not to the young. The wind's mostly tempered to the shorn lamb, though the auld ewe do oftentimes sting for it, an' get the seeds o' death arter shearing. Wait, and be strong, till you feel Clem's baaby in your arms. That'll be reward enough, an' you won't care no more for the world then. His son, mind; who be you to take life, an' break the buds of Clem's plantin'? Worse than to go in another's garden an' tear down green fruit.'

So she pleaded volubly, with an electric increase of vitality, and continued to pour out a torrent of words, until Chris solemnly promised, before God and the dead, that she would not take her life. Having done so, some new design informed her.

'I must go,' she said; 'the moon has set and dawn is near. Dying be so easy; living so hard. But live I will; I swear it, though theer's awnly my poor mad brain to shaw how.'

'Clem's son, mind. An' let me be the first to see it, for I feel 'twill be the gude pleasure of God I should.'

'An' you promise to say no word, whatever betides, an' whatever you hear?'

'Dumb I'll be, as him theer—dumb countin' the weeks an' months.'

'Day's broke, an' I must go home along,' said Chris. She repeated the words mechanically, then moved away without any formal farewell. At the door she turned, hastened back, kissed the dead man's face again, and then departed, while the other woman looked at her but spoke no more.

Alone, with the struggle over and her object won, the mother shrank and dwindled again and grew older momentarily. Then she relapsed into the same posture as before, and anon, tears bred of new thoughts, began to trickle painfully from their parched fountains. She did not move, but let them roll unwiped away. Presently her head sank back, her cap fell off and white hair dropped about her face.

Fingers of light seemed lifting the edges of the blind. They gained strength as the candle waned, and presently at cock-crow, when unnumbered clarions proclaimed morning, grey dawn with golden eyes brightened upon a dead man and an ancient woman fast asleep beside him.

CHAPTER XVII

MISSING

JOHN GRIMBAL, actuated by some whim, or else conscious that under the circumstances decorum demanded his attendance, was present at the funeral of Clement Hicks. Some cynic interest he derived from the spectacle of young Blanchard among the bearers; and indeed, as may be supposed, few had felt this tragic termination of his friend's life more than Will.

Very genuine remorse darkened his days, and he blamed himself bitterly enough for all past differences with the dead. It was in a mood at once contrite and sorrowful that he listened to the echo of falling clod, and during that solemn sound mentally traversed the whole course of his relations with his sister's lover. Of himself he thought not at all, and no shadowy suspicion of relief crossed his mind upon the reflection that the knowledge of those fateful weeks long past was now unshared. In all his quarrels with Clement, no possibility of the man breaking his oath had once troubled Will's mind; and now profound sorrow at his friend's death and deep sympathy with Chris were the emotions that entirely filled the young farmer's heart.

Grimbal watched his enemy as the service beside the grave proceeded. Once a malignant thought darkened his face, and he mused on what the result might be if he hinted to Blanchard the nature of his frustrated business with Hicks at Oke Tor. All Chagford had heard was that the master of the Red House intended to accept Clement Hicks as tenant of his home farm. The fact surprised many, but none looked behind it for any mystery, and Will least of all. Grimbal's thoughts developed upon his first idea, and he asked himself the consequence if, instead of telling Blanchard that he had gone to learn his secret, he should pretend that it was already in his possession. The notion shone for a moment only, then went out. First, it showed itself absolutely futile, for he could do no more than threaten and the other must speedily discover that in reality he knew nothing; and secondly, some shadow of feeling made Grimbal hesitate. His desire for revenge was now developing on new lines, and while his purpose remained unshaken, his last defeat had taught him patience. Partly from motives

of policy, partly, strange as it may seem, from his instincts as a sportsman, he determined to let the matter of Hicks lie buried. For the dead man's good name he cared nothing, however, and victory over Will was only the more desired for this postponement. His black tenacity of purpose won strength from the repulse, but the problem for the time being was removed from its former sphere of active hatred towards his foe. How long this attitude would last, and what idiosyncrasy of character led to it, matters little. The fact remained that Grimbald's mental posture towards Blanchard now more nearly resembled that he wore to his other interests in life. The circumstance stood first still, but partook of the nature of his emotions towards matters of sport. When a heavy trout had beaten him more than once Grimbald would repair again and again to its particular haunt and leave no legitimate plan for its destruction untried. But any unsportsmanlike method of capturing or slaying bird, beast, or fish enraged him. So he left the churchyard with a sullen determination to pursue his sinister purpose straightforwardly.

All interested in Clement Hicks attended the funeral, including his mother and Chris. The last had yielded to Mrs. Blanchard's desire and promised to stop at home; but she changed her mind and conducted herself at the ceremony with a stoic fortitude. This she achieved only by an effort of will which separated her consciousness entirely from her environment and alike blinded her eyes and deafened her ears to the mournful sights and sounds around her. With her own future every fibre of her mind was occupied; and as they lowered her lover's coffin into the earth a line of action leapt into her brain.

Less than four-and-twenty hours later it seemed that the last act of the tragedy had begun. Then hoarse

as the raven that croaked Duncan's coming, Mr. Blee returned to Monks Barton from an early visit to the village. Phœbe was staying with her father for a fortnight, and it was she who met the old man as he paddled breathlessly home.

'More gert news!' he gasped; 'if it ban't too much for wan in your way o' health.'

'Nothing wrong at Newtake?' cried Phœbe, turning pale.

'No, no; but family news for all that.'

The girl raised her hand to her heart, and Miller Lyddon, attracted by Billy's excited voice, hastened to her and put his arm round his daughter.

'Out with it,' he said. 'I see news in 'e. What's the worst or best?'

'Bad, bad as heart can wish. A peck o' trouble by the looks of it. Chris Blanchard be gone—vanished like a dream! Mother Blanchard called her this marnin', an' found her bed not so much as creased. She've flown, an' there's a braave upstore 'bout it, for every Blanchard's wrong in the head more or less, beggin' your pardon, missis, as be awnly wan by marriage.'

'But no sign? No word or anything left?'

'Nothing; an' theer's a purty strong faith she'm in the river, poor lamb. Theer's draggin' gwaine to be done in the ugly bits. I heard tell of it to the village, wheer I'd just stepped up to see auld Lezzard moved to the work'ouse. A wonnerful, coorious, rackety world sure 'nough! Do make me giddy.'

'Does Will know?' asked Mr. Lyddon.

'His mother's sent post haste for un. I doubt he'm to the cottage by now. Such a gude, purty gal as she was, tu! An' so mute as a twoad at the buryin', wi' never a tear to soften the graave dust. For why? She knawed she'd be alongside her man again 'fore

the moon waned. An' I hope she may be. But 'twas cross-roads an' a hawthorn stake in my young days. Them barbarous ancient fashions be awver, thank God, though whether us lives in more religious times is a question, when you see the things what happens every hour on the twenty-four.'

'I must go to them,' cried Phœbe.

'I'll go; you stop at home quietly, and don't fret your mind,' answered her father.

'Us must all do what us can—every man jack. I be gwaine corpse-searchin' down valley wi' Chapple, an' that 'mazin' water-dog of his'n; an' if 'tis my hand brings her out the Teign, 'twill be done in a kind, Christian manner, for she's in God's image yet, same as us; an' ugly though a drownin' be, it won't turn me from my duty.'

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

BABY

SUCCESSFUL upon the tumultuous incidents of Clement's death and Chris Blanchard's disappearance, there followed a period of calm in the lives of those from whom this narrative is gleaned. Such transient peace proved the greater in so far as Damaris and her son were concerned, by reason of an incident which befell Will on the evening of his sister's departure. Dead she certainly was not, nor did she mean to die; for, upon returning to Newtake after hours of fruitless searching, Blanchard found a communication awaiting him there, though no shadow of evidence was forthcoming to show how it had reached the farm. Upon the ledge of the window he discovered it when he returned, and read the message at a glance:—

‘Don't you nor mother fear nothing for me, nor seek me out, for it would be vain. I'm well, and I'm so happy as ever I shall be, and perhaps I'll come back to 'e some day.—CHRIS.’

On this challenge Will acted, ignored his sister's entreaty to attempt no such thing, and set out upon a resolute search of nearly two months' duration. He toiled amain into the late autumn, but no hint or

shadow of her rewarded the quest, and sustained failure in an enterprise where his heart was set, for his mother's sake and his own, acted upon the man's character, and indeed wrought marked changes in him. Despite the letter of Chris, hope died in Will, and he openly held his sister dead; but Mrs. Blanchard, while sufficiently distressed before her daughter's flight, never feared for her life, and doubted not but that she would return in such time as it pleased her to do so.

'Her nature be same as yours an' your faither's afore you. When he'd got the black monkey on his shoulder he'd oftentimes leave the vans for a week and tramp the very heart o' the Moor alone. Fatigue of body often salves a sore mind. He loved thunder o' dark nights—my husband did—and was better for it seemin'ly. Chris be safe, I do think, though it's a heart-deep stroke this for me, 'cause I judge she caan't 'zactly love me as I thought, or else she'd never have left me. Still, the cold world, what she knaws so little 'bout, will drive her back to them as love her come presently.'

So, with greater philosophy than her son could muster, Damaris practised patience; while Will, after a perambulation of the country from north to south, from west to east, after weeks on the lonely heaths and hiding-places of the ultimate Moor, after visits to remote hamlets and inquiries at a hundred separate farmhouses, returned to Newtake, worn, disappointed, and gloomy to a degree beyond the experience of those who knew him. Neither did the cloud speedily evaporate, as was most usual with his transient phases of depression. Circumstances combined to deepen it, and as the winter crowded down more quickly than usual, its leaden months of scanty daylight and cold rains left their mark on Will as time had never done before.

During those few and sombre days which represented the epact of the dying year, Martin Grimal returned to Chagford. He had extended his investigations beyond the time originally allotted to them, and now came back to his home with plenty of fresh material, and even one or two new theories for his book. He had received no communications during his absence, and the news of the beekeeper's death and his sweetheart's disappearance, suddenly delivered by his housekeeper, went far to overwhelm him. It danced joy up again through the grey granite. For a brief hour splendid vistas of happiness reopened, and his laborious life swept suddenly into a bright region that he had gazed into longingly aforetime and lost for ever. He fought with himself to keep down this rosy-fledged hope; but it leapt in him, a young giant born at a word. The significance of the freedom of Chris staggered him. To find her was the cry of his heart, and, as Will had done before him, he straightway set out upon a systematic attempt to discover the missing girl. Of such uncertain temper was Blanchard's mind at this season, however, that he picked a quarrel out of Martin's design, and questioned the antiquary's right to busy himself upon an undertaking which the brother of Chris had already failed to accomplish.

'She belonged to me, not to you,' he said, 'an' I done all a man could do to find her. See her again we sha'n't, that's my feelin', despite what she wrote to me and left so mysterious on the window. Madness comed awver her, I reckon, an' she've taken her life, an' theer ban't no call for you or any other man to rip up the matter again. Let it bide as 'tis. Such black doin's be best set to rest.'

But, while Martin did not seek or desire Will's advice in the matter, he was surprised at the young farmer's attitude, and it extracted something in the

nature of a confession from him, for there was little, he told himself, that need longer be hidden from the woman's brother.

'I can speak now, at least to you, Will,' he said. 'I can tell you, at any rate. Chris was all the world to me,—all the world, and accident kept me from knowing she belonged to another man until too late. Now that he has gone, poor fellow, she almost seems within reach again. You know what it is to love. I can't and won't believe she has taken her life. Something tells me she lives, and I am not going to take any man's word about it. I must satisfy myself.'

Thereupon Blanchard became more reasonable, withdrew his objections, and expressed a very heartfelt hope that Martin might succeed where he had failed. The lover entered methodically upon his quest and conducted the inquiry with a rigorous closeness and scrupulous patience quite beyond Will's power despite his equally earnest intentions. For six months Martin pursued his hope, and few saw or heard anything of him during that period.

Once, during the early summer, Will chanced upon John Grimbald at the first meeting of the otter hounds in Teign Vale; but though the younger purposely edged near his enemy where he stood, and hoped that some word might fall to indicate their ancient enmity dead, John said nothing, and his blue eyes were hard and as devoid of all emotion as turquoise beads when they met the farmer's face for one fraction of time.

Before this incident, however, there had arisen upon Will's life the splendour of paternity. A time came when, through one endless night and silver April morning, he had tramped his kitchen floor as a tiger its cage, and left a scratched pathway on the stones.

Then his mother hasted from aloft and reported the arrival of a rare baby boy.

'Phœbe's doin' braave, an' she prays of 'e to go down-long fust thing an' tell Miller all's well. Doctor Parsons hisself says 'tis a 'mazing fine cheel, so it ban't any mere word of mine as wouldn't weigh, me bein' the gran'mother.'

They talked a little while of the new-comer, then, thankful for an opportunity to be active after his long suspense, the father hurried away, mounted a horse, and soon rattled down the valleys into Chagford, at a pace which found his beast dead lame on the following day. Mighty was the exhilaration of that wild gallop as he sped past cot and farm under morning sunshine with his great news. Labouring men and chance wayfarers were overtaken from time to time. Some Will knew, some he had never seen, but to the ear of each and all without discrimination he shouted his intelligence. Not a few waved their hats and nodded and remembered the great day in their own lives; one laughed and cried, 'Bravo!' sundry, who knew him not, marvelled and took him for a lunatic.

Arrived at Chagford, familiar forms greeted Will in the market-place, and again he bawled his information without dismounting.

'A son 'tis, Chapple—comed an hour ago—a brave li'l bwoy, so they tell!'

'Gude luck to it, then! An', now you'm a parent, you must——'

But Will was out of earshot, and Mr. Chapple wasted no more breath.

Into Monks Barton the farmer presently clattered, threw himself off his horse, tramped indoors, and shouted for his father-in-law, in tones that made the oak beams ring. Then the Miller, with Mr. Blee

behind him, hastened to hear what Will had come to tell.

'All right, all right with Phoebe?' were Mr. Lyddon's first words, and he was white and shaking as he put the question.

'Right as ninepence, faither—gran'faither I should say. A butivul li'l man she've got—out o' the common fine, Parsons says, as ought to knaw—fat as a slug wi' 'mazin' dark curls on his wee head, though my mother says 'tis awnly a sort o' catch-crop, an' not the lasting hair as'll come arter.'

'A bwoy! Glory be!' said Mr. Blee. 'If theer's awnly a bit o' the gracious gudeness of his gran'faither in un, 'twill prove a prosperous infant.'

'Thank God for a happy end to all my prayers,' said Mr. Lyddon. 'Billy, get Will something to eat an' drink. I guess he's hungry an' starved.'

'Caan't eat, Miller; but I'll have a drop of the best if it's all the same to you. Us must drink their healths, both of 'em. As for me, 'tis a gert thing to be the faither of a cheel as'll graw into a man some day, an' may even be a historical character, awnly give un time.'

'So 'tis a gert thing. Sit down; doan't tramp about. I lay you've been on your feet enough these late hours.'

Will obeyed, but proceeded with his theme, and though his feet were still his hands were not.

'Us be faced wi' the upbringing an' edication of un. I mean him to be brought up to a power o' knowledge, for theer's nothin' like it. Doan't you think I be gwaine to shirk doin' the right thing by un, Miller, 'cause it ain't so. If 'twas my last fi'-pun' note was called up for larnin' him, he'd have it.'

'Theer's no gert hurry yet,' declared Billy. 'Awnly you'm right to look in the future and weigh the debt

every man owes to the cheel he gets. He'll never cost you less thought or half-pence than he do to-day, an', wi'out croakin' at such a gay time, I will say he'll grow into a graater care an' trouble, every breath he draws.'

'Not him! Not the way I'm gwaine to bring un up. Stern an' strict an' no nonsense I promise 'e.'

'That's right. Tame un from the breast. I'd like for my paart to think as the very sapling be grawin' now as'll give his li'l behind its fust lesson in the ways o' duty,' declared Mr. Blee. 'Theer's certain things you must be flint-hard about, an' fust comes lying. Doan't let 'n lie; flog it out of un; an' mind 'tis better for your arm to ache than for his soul to burn.'

'You leave me to do right by un. You caan't teach me, Billy, not bein' a parent; though I allow what you say is true enough.'

'An' set un to work early; get un into ways o' work so soon as he's able to wear corduroys. An' doan't never let un be cruel to beastes; an' doan't let un——'

'Theer, theer!' cried Mr. Lyddon. 'Have done with 'e! You speak as fules both, settin' out rules o' life for an hour-old babe. You talk to his mother about tamin' of un an' grawing saplings for his better bringing up. She'll tell 'e a thing or two. Just mind the slowness o' growth in the human young. 'Twill be years before theer's enough of un to beat.'

'They do come very gradual to fulness o' body an' reason,' admitted Billy; 'an' 'tis gude it should be so; 'tis well all men an' women's got to be childer fust, for they brings brightness an' joy 'pon the earth as babies, though 'tis mostly changed when they'm grawed up. If us could awnly foretell the turnin' out o' childern, an' knaw which 'twas best to drown an' which

to save in tender youth, what a differ'nt world this would be!'

'They'm poor li'l twoads at fust, no doubt,' said Will to his father-in-law.

'Ess, indeed they be. 'Tis a coorious circumstance, but generally allowed, that humans are the awnly creatures o' God wi' understandin', an' yet they comes into the world more helpless an' brainless, an' bides longer helpless an' brainless than any other beast knawn.'

'Shouldn't call 'em "beastes" 'zactly, seein' they've got the Holy Ghost from the church font ever after,' objected Billy. "'Tis the differ'nce between a babe an' a pup or a kitten. The wan gets God into un at christenin', t' other wouldn't have no Holy Ghost in un if you baptised un over a hunderd times. For why? They'm not built in the Image.'

'When all's said, you caan't look tu far ahead or be tu forehanded wi' bwoys,' resumed Will. 'Gallop in' down-long I said to myself, "Theer's things he may do an' things he may not do. He shall choose his awn road in reason, but he must be guided by me in the choice." I won't let un go for a sailor—never. I'll cut un off wi' a shillin' if he thinks of it.'

'Time enough when he can walk an' talk, I reckon,' said Billy, who, seeing how his master viewed the matter, now caught Mr. Lyddon's manner.

'Ess, that's very well,' continued Will, 'but time flies that fast wi' childer. Then I thought, "He'll come to marry some day, sure's Fate." Myself, I believe in tolerable early marryin's.'

'By God! I knaw it!' retorted Mr. Lyddon, with an expression wherein appeared mingled feelings not a few; 'Ess fay! You'm right theer. I should take Time by the forelock if I was you, an' see if you can find a maiden as'll suit un while you go back-along through the village.'

'Awnly, as 'tis better for the man to number more years than the wummon,' added Billy, 'it might be wise to bide a week or two, so's he shall have a bit start of his lady.'

'Now, you 'm fulin' me! An' I caan't stay no more, whether or no, 'cause I was promised to see Phœbe an' my son in the arternoon. Us be gwaine to call un Vincent William Blanchard, arter you an' me, Miller; an' if it had been a gal, us meant to call un arter mother; an' I do thank God 'bout the bwoy in all solemn soberness, 'cause 'tis the fust real gude thing as have falled to us since the gwaine of poor Chris. 'Twill be a joy to my mother an' a gude gran'son to you, I hope.'

'Go home, go home,' said Mr. Lyddon. 'Get along with 'e this minute, an' tell your wife I'm greatly pleased, an' shall come to see her mighty soon. Let us knaw every day how she fares—an'—an'—I'm glad as you called the laddie arter me. 'Twas a seemly thought.'

Will departed, and his mind roamed over various splendid futures for his baby. Already he saw it a tall, straight, splendid man, not a hair shorter than his own six feet two inches. He hoped that it would possess his natural wisdom, augmented by Phœbe's marvellous management of figures and accounts. He also desired for it a measure of his mother's calm and stately self-possession before the problems of life, and he had no objection that his son should reflect Miller Lyddon's many and amiable virtues.

He returned home, and his mother presently bid him come to see Phœbe. Then a sudden nervousness overtook Will, tough though he was. The door shut, and husband and wife were alone together, for Damaris disappeared. But where were all those great and splendid pictures of the future? Vanished, vanished

in a mist. Will's breast heaved ; he saw Phoebe's star-bright eyes peeping at him, and he touched the treasure beside her—oh, so small it was !

He bent his head low over them, kissed his wife shyly, and peeped with proper timidity under the flannel.

'Look, look, Will, dearie ! Did 'e ever see ought like un ? An' come evenin', he 'm gwaine to have his fust li'l drink !'

CHAPTER II

THE KNIGHT OF FORLORN HOPES

THE child brought all a child should bring to Newtake, though it could not hide the fact that Will Blanchard drifted daily a little nearer to the end of his resources. But occasional success still flattered his ambition, and he worked hard and honestly. In this respect at least the man proved various fears unfounded, yet the result of his work rarely took shape of sovereigns. He marvelled at the extraordinary steadiness with which ill-fortune clung to Newtake and cursed when, on two quarter-days out of the annual four, another dip had had to be made into the dwindling residue of his uncle's bequest. Some three hundred pounds yet remained when young Blanchard entered upon a further stage of his career—that most fitly recorded as happening within the shadow of a granite cross.

After long months of absence from home, Martin Grimbald returned, silent, unsuccessful, and sad. Upon the foundations of facts he had built many tentative dwelling-places for hope ; but all had crumbled, failure crowned his labours, and as far from the reach of his discovery seemed the secret of Chris as the secrets of the sacred circles, stone avenues, and empty, hypaethral

chambers of the Moor. Spiritless and bitterly discouraged, he returned after such labours as Will had dreamed not of; and his life, succeeding upon this deep disappointment, seemed far advanced towards its end in Martin's eyes—a journey whose brightest incidents, happiest places of rest, most precious companions were all left behind. This second death of hope aged the man in truth and sowed his hair with grey. Now only a melancholy memory of one very beautiful and very sad remained to him. Chris indeed promised to return, but he told himself that such a woman had never left an unhappy mother for such period of time if power to come home still belonged to her. Then, surveying the past, he taxed himself heavily with a deliberate and cruel share in it. Why had he taken the advice of Blanchard and delayed his offer of work to Hicks? He told himself that it was because he knew such a step would definitely deprive him of Chris for ever; and therein he charged himself with offences that his nature was above committing. Then he burst into bitter blame of Will, and at a weak moment—for nothing is weaker than the rare weakness of a strong man—he childishly upbraided the farmer with that fateful advice concerning Clement, and called down upon his head deep censure for the subsequent catastrophe. Will, as may be imagined, proved not slow to resent such an attack with heart and voice. A great heat of vain recrimination followed, and the men broke into open strife.

Sick with himself at this pitiable lapse, shaken in his self-respect, desolate, unsettled, and uncertain of the very foundations on which he had hitherto planted his life, the elder man existed through a black month, then braced himself again, looked out into the world, set his dusky desk in order, and sought once more amidst the relics of the past for comfort and consolation. He

threw himself upon his book and told himself that it must surely reward his pains ; he toiled mightily at his lonely task, and added a little to man's knowledge.

Once it happened that the Rev. Shorto-Champernowne met Martin. Riding over the Moor after a visit to his clerical colleague of Gidleigh, the clergyman trotted through Scorhill Circle, above northern Teign, and, seeing a well-known parishioner, drew up awhile.

'How prosper your profound studies?' he inquired. 'Do these evidences of aboriginal races lead you to any conclusions of note? For my part, I am not wholly devoid of suspicion that a man might better employ his time, though I should not presume to make any such suggestion to you.'

'You may be right ; but one is generally unwise to stamp on his ruling passion if it takes him along an intellectual road. These cryptic stones are my life. I want to get the secret of them or find at least a little of it. What are those lonely rings? Where are we standing now? In a place of worship, where men prayed to the thunder and the sun and stars? Or a council chamber? Or a court of justice, that has seen many a doom pronounced, much red blood flow? Or is it a grave? 'Tis the fashion to reject the notion that they represent any religious purpose ; yet I cannot see any argument against the theory. I go on peeping and prying after a spark of truth. I probe here, and in the fallen circle yonder towards Cosdon ; I follow the stone rows to Fernworthy ; I trudge again and again to the Grey Wethers—that shattered double ring on Sittaford Tor. I eat them up with my eyes and repeople the heath with those who raised them. Some day a gleam of light may come. And if it does, it will reach me through study on those stone men of old. It is along the human side of my investigations I shall learn if I learn anything at all.'

‘I hope you may achieve your purpose, though the memoranda and data are scanty. Your name is mentioned in the *Western Morning News* as a pains-taking inquirer.’

‘Yet when theories demand proof—that’s the rub!’

‘Yes, indeed. You are a knight of forlorn hopes, Grimbald,’ answered the Vicar, alluding to Martin’s past search for Chris as much as to his present archæologic ambitions. Then he trotted on over the river, and the pedestrian remained as before seated upon a recumbent stone in the midst of the circle of Scorhill. Silent he sat and gazed into the lichens of grey and gold that crowned each rude pillar of the lonely ring. These, as it seemed, were the very eyes of the granite, but to Martin they represented but the cloak of yesterday, beneath which centuries of secrets were hidden. Only the stones and the eternal west wind, that had seen them set up and still blew over them, could tell him anything he sought to know.

‘A Knight of Forlorn Hopes,’ mused the man. ‘So it is, so it is. The grasshopper, rattling his little kettledrum there, knows nearly as much of this hoary secret as I do; and the bird, that prunes his wing on the porphyry, and is gone again. Not till some Damnonian spirit rises from the barrow, not till some chieftain of these vanished hosts shall take shape out of the mists and speak, may we glean a grain of this buried knowledge. And who to-day would believe ten thousand ghosts, if they stirred here once again and thronged the Moor and the moss and the ruined stone villages with their moon-beam shapes?’

‘Gone for ever; and she—my Chris—my dear—is she to dwell in the darkness for all time, too? O God, I would rather hear one whisper of her voice, feel one touch of her brown hand, than learn the primal truth of every dumb stone wonder in the world.’

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING THE GATE-POST

So that good store of roots and hay continue for the cattle during those months of early spring while yet the Moor is barren; so that the potato-patch prospers and the oats ripen well; so that neither pony nor bullock are lost in the shaking bogs, and late summer is dry enough to allow of ample peat-storing—when all these conditions prevail your moorman counts his year a fat one. The upland farmers of Devon are in great measure armed against the bolts of chance by the nature of their lives, the grey character of even their most cheerful experiences and the poverty of their highest ambitions. Their aspirations, becoming speedily cowed by ill-requited toil and eternal hardship, quickly dwarf and shrink, until even the most sanguine seldom extend hope much beyond necessity.

Will grumbled, growled and fought on, while Phoebe, who knew how nobly the valleys repaid husbandry, mourned in secret that his energetic labours here could but produce such meagre results. Very gradually their environment stamped its frosty seal on man and woman; and by the time that little Will was two years old his parents viewed life, its good and its evil, much as other Moor folks contemplated it. Phoebe's heart was still sweet enough, but she grew more selfish for herself and her own, more self-centred in great Will and little Will. They filled her existence to the gradual exclusion of wider sympathies. Miller Lyddon had given his grandson a silver mug on the day he was baptised, though since that time the old man held more aloof from the life of Newtake than Phoebe understood. Sometimes

she wondered that he had never offered to assist her husband practically, but Will much resented the suggestion when Phœbe submitted it to him. There was no need for any such thing, he declared. As for him, transitory ambitions and hopes gleamed up in his career as formerly, though less often. So man and wife found their larger natures somewhat crushed by the various immediate problems that each day brought along with it. Beyond the narrow horizon of their own concerns they rarely looked, and Chagford people, noting the change, declared that life at Newtake was tying their tongues and lining their foreheads. Will certainly grew more taciturn, less free of advice, perhaps less frank than formerly. A sort of strangeness shadowed him, and only his mother or his son could dispel it. The latter soon learned to understand his father's many moods, and would laugh or cry, show joy or fear, according to the tune of the man's voice.

There came an evening in mid-September when Will sat at the open hearth and smoked, with his eyes fixed on a fire of scads.¹ He remained very silent, and Phœbe, busy about a small coat of red cloth, to keep the cold from her little son's bones during the coming winter, knew that it was not one of her husband's happiest evenings. His eyes were looking through the fire and the wall behind it, through the wastes and wildernesses beyond, through the granite hills to the far-away edge of the world, where Fate sat spinning the threads of the lives of his loved ones. Threads they looked, in his gloomy survey of that night, much deformed with knot and tangle, for the Spinner cared nothing at all about them. She suffered each to wind heedlessly away; she minded not that they were ugly;

¹ *Scads* = the outer rind of the peat, with ling and grass still adhering to it.

she spared no strand of gold or silver from her skein of human happiness to brighten the grey fabric of them. So it seemed to Will, and his temper chimed with a rough night in October. The wind howled and growled down the chimney, uttered many a sudden yell and ghostly moan, struck with claws invisible at the glowing heart of the peat fire, and sent red sparks dancing from a corona of faint blue flame.

'Winter's comin' quick,' said Phœbe, biting her thread.

'Ess, winter's allus comin' up here. The fight begins again so soon as ever 'tis awver—again and again and again, 'cordin' to the workin' years of a man's life. Then he turns on his back for gude an' all, an' takes his rest, wheer theer's no more seasons, nor frost, nor sunshine, in the world under.'

'You 'm glumpy, dear heart. What's amiss? What's crossed 'e. Tell me, an' I'll lay I'll find a word to smooth it away. Nothin' contrary happened to market?'

'No, no—awnly my nature. When the wind's spelling winter in the chimbley, an' the yether's dead again, 'tis wisht lookin' forrard. The airth's allus dyin', an' the life of her be that short, an' grubbin' of bare food an' rent out of her is sour work after many years. Thank God I'm a hopeful, far-seein' chap, an' sound as a bell; but I doan't make money for all my sweat, that's the mystery.'

'You will some day. Luck be gwaine to turn 'fore long, I hope. An' us have got what's better'n money; what caan't be bought.'

'The li'l bwoy?'

'Ay; if us hadn't nothin' but him, theer's many would envy our lot.'

'Childer's no such gert blessin' neither.'

'Will! How can you say it?'

'I do say it. We'm awnly used to keep up the breed, then thraved o' wan side. I'm sick o' men an' women folks. Theer's too many of 'em.'

'But childer—our li'l Will. The moosic of un be sweeter than song o' birds all times, an' you'd be fust to say so if you wasn't out of yourself.'

'He'm a braave, small lad enough ; but theer again ! Why should he have been pitched into this here home ? He might have been put in a palace just as easy, an' born of a royal queen mother, 'stead o' you ; he might have opened his eyes 'pon marble walls an' jewels an' precious stones, 'stead of whitewash an' a peat fire. Be that baaby gwaine to thank us for bringing him in the world come he graw up ? Not him ! Why should he ?'

'But he will. We'm his faither an' mother. Do 'e love your mother less for bearin' you in a gipsy van ? Little Will's to pay us noble for all our toil some day, an' be a joy to our grey hairs an' a prop to our auld age, please God.'

'Ha, ha !—story-books ! Gi' me a cup o' milk ; then us'll go to bed.'

She obeyed ; he piled turf upon the hearth, to keep the fire alight until morning, then took up the candle and followed Phœbe through another chamber, half scullery, half storehouse, into which descended the staircase from above. Here hung the pale carcass of a newly-slain pig, suspended by its hind-legs from a loop in the ceiling ; and Phœbe, many of whose little delicacies of manner had vanished of late, patted the carcass lovingly, like the good farmer's wife she was.

'Wish theer was more so big in the sties,' she said.

Arrived at her bedside, the woman prayed before sinking to rest within reach of her child's cot ; while Will, troubling Heaven with no petition or thanksgiving, was in bed five minutes sooner than his wife.

'Gude-night, lad,' said Phœbe, as she put the candle

out, but her husband only returned an inarticulate grunt for answer, being already within the portal of sleep.

A fair morning followed on the tempestuous night, and Winter, who had surely whispered her coming under the darkness, vanished again at dawn. The Moor still provided forage, but all light was gone out of the heather, though the standing fern shone golden yellow under the sun, and the recumbent bracken shed a rich russet in broad patches over the dewy green where Will had chopped it down and left it to dry for winter fodder. He was very late this year in stacking the fern, and designed that labour for his morning's occupation.

Ted Chown chanced to be away for a week's holiday, so Will entered his farmyard early. The variable weather of his mind rarely stood for long at storm, but, unlike the morning, he had awakened in no happy mood.

A child's voice served for a time to smooth his brow, now clouded from survey of a broken spring in his market-cart; then came the lesser Will with a small china mug for his morning drink. Phœbe watched him sturdily tramp across the yard, and the greater Will laughed to see his son's alarm before the sudden stampede of a belated heifer, which now hastened through the open gate to join its companions on the hill-side.

'Cooshey, cooshey won't hurt 'e my li'l bud!' cried Phœbe, as Ship jumped and barked at the lumbering beast. Then the child doubled round a dung-heap and fled to his father's arms. From the byre a cow with a full udder softly lowed, and now small Will had a cup of warm milk; then, with his red mouth like a rosebud in mist and his father's smile magically and laughably reproduced upon his little face, he trotted back to his mother.

A moment later Will, still milking, heard himself

loudly called from the gate. The voice he knew well enough, but it was pitched unusually high, and denoted a condition of excitement and impatience very seldom to be met with in its possessor. Martin Grimbald, for it was he, did not observe Blanchard, as the farmer emerged from the byre. His eyes were bent in startled and critical scrutiny of a granite post, to which the front gate of Newtake latched, and he continued shouting aloud until Will stood beside him. Then he appeared on his hands and knees beside the gate-post. He had flung down his stick and satchel; his mouth was slightly open; his cap rested on the side of his head; his face seemed transfigured before some overwhelming discovery.

Relations were still strained between these men; and Will did not forget the fact, though it had evidently escaped Martin in his present excitement.

'What the deuce be doin' now?' asked Blanchard abruptly.

'Man alive! A marvel! Look here—to think I have passed this stone a hundred times and never noticed!'

He rose, brushed his muddy knees, still gazing at the gate-post, then took a trowel from his bag and began to cut away the turf about the base of it.

'Let that bide!' called out the master sharply. 'What be 'bout delving theer?'

'I forgot you didn't know. I was coming to see you on my way to the Moor. I wanted a drink and a handshake. We mustn't be enemies, and I'm heartily sorry for what I said—heartily. But here's a fitting object to build new friendship on. I just caught sight of the incisions through a fortunate gleam of early morning light. Come this side and see for yourself. To think you had what a moorman would reckon good fortune at your gate and never guessed it!'

'Fortune at my gate? Wheer to? I ain't heard nothin' of it.'

'Here, man, here! D'you see this post?'

'Not bein' blind, I do.'

'Yet you were blind, and so was I. There's excuse for you, none for me. It's a cross! Yes, a priceless old Christian cross, buried here head downward by some profane soul in the distant past, who found it of size and shape to make a gate-post. They are common enough in Cornwall, but very rare in Devon. It's a great—a remarkable discovery in fact, and I'm right glad I found it on your threshold; for we may be friends again beside this symbol fittingly enough—eh, Will?'

'Bother your rot,' answered the other coldly and quite unimpassioned before Martin's eloquence. 'You doubted my judgment not long since and said hard things and bad things; now I take leave to doubt yours. How do 'e knaw this here's a cross any more than t' other post the gate hangs on?'

Martin, recalled to reality and the presence of a man till then unfriendly, blushed and shrank into himself a little. His voice showed that he suffered pain.

'I read granite as you read sheep and soil and a crop ripening above ground or below—it's my business,' he explained, not without constraint, while the enthusiasm died away out of his voice and the fire from his face.

See now, Will, try and follow me. Note these very faint lines, where the green moss takes the place of the lichen. These are fretted grooves—you can trace them to the earth, and on a "rubbing," as we call it, they would be plainer still. They indicate to me incisions down the sides of a cross-shaft. They are all that many years of weathering have left. Look at the shape too: the stone grows slightly thinner every way towards the ground. What is hidden we can't say

yet, but I pray that the arms may be at least still indicated. You see it is the base sticking into the air, and more's the pity, a part has gone, for I can trace the incisions to the top. God knows the past history of it, but——'

'Perhaps He do and perhaps He doan't,' interrupted the farmer. 'Perhaps it weer a cross an' perhaps it weern't; anyway, it's my gate-post now, an' as to diggin' it up, you may be surprised to knaw it, Martin Grimbald, but I'll see you damned fust! I'm weary of all this bunkum 'bout auld stones an' circles an' the rest; I'm sick an' tired o' leavin' my work a hunderd times in summer months to shaw gaping fules from Lunnon an' Lard knaws wheer them roundy-poundies 'pon my land. 'Tis all rot, as every moorman knaws; yet you an' such as you screams if us dares to put a finger to the stone nowadays. Ban't the granite ours under Venwell? You knaw it is; an' because dead an' gone folk, half monkeys belike, fashioned their homes an' holes out of it, be that any cause why it shouldn't be handled to-day? They've had their use of it; now 'tis our turn; an' 'tis awnly such as you be, as comes here in shining summer, when the land puts on a lying faace, as though it didn't knaw weather an' winter—'tis awnly such as you must cry out against us of the soil if we dares to set wan stone 'pon another to make a wall or keep the blasted rabbits out the young wheat.'

'Your attitude is one-sided, Will,' said Martin Grimbald gently; 'besides, remember this is a cross. We're dealing with a relic of our faith, take my word for it.'

'Faith be damned! What's a cross to me? 'Tis doin' more gude wheer 'tis than ever it done afore, I'll swear.'

'I hope you'll live to see you're wrong, Blanchard. I've met you in an evil hour it seems. You're not

yourself. Think about it. There's no hurry. You pride yourself on your common-sense as a rule. I'm sure it will come to your rescue. Granted this discovery is nothing to you, yet think what it means to me. If I'd found a diamond mine I couldn't be better pleased—not half so pleased as now.'

Will reflected a moment; but the other had not knowledge of character to observe or realise that he was slowly becoming reasonable.

'So I do pride myself on my common-sense, an' I've some right to. A cross is a cross—I allow that—and whatever I may think, I ban't so small-minded as to fall foul of them as think differ'nt. My awn mother be a churchgoer for that matter, an' you'll look far ways for her equal. But of coourse I knaw what I knaw. Me an' Hicks talked out matters of religion so dry as chaff.'

'Yet a cross means much to many, and always will while the land continues to call itself Christian.'

'I knaw, I knaw. 'Twill call itself Christian long arter your time an' mine; as to bein' Christian—that's another story. Clem Hicks lightened such matters to me—fule though he was in the ordering of his awn life. But s'pose you digs the post up, for argeyment's sake. What about me, as have to go out 'pon the Moor an' blast another new wan out the virgin granite wi' gun-powder? Do 'e think I've nothin' better to do with my time than that?'

Here, in his supreme anxiety and eagerness, forgetting the manner of man he argued with, Martin made a fatal mistake.

'That's reasonable and businesslike,' he said. 'I wouldn't have you suffer for lost time, which is part of your living. I'll give you ten pounds for the stone, Will, and that should more than pay for your time and for the new post.'

He glanced into the other's face and instantly saw his error. The farmer's countenance clouded and his features darkened until he looked like an angry Red-skin. His eyes glinted steel-bright under a ferocious frown; the squareness of his jaw became much marked.

'You dare to say that, do 'e? An' me as good a man, an' better, than you or your brother either! Money—you remind me I'm—— Theer! You can go to blue, blazin' hell for your granite crosses—that's wheer you can go—you or any other poking, prying pelican! Offer money to me, would 'e? Who be you, or any other man, to offer me money for wasted time? As if I was a road scavenger or another man's servant! God's truth! you forget who you'm talkin' to!'

'This is to purposely misunderstand me, Blanchard. I never, never meant any such thing. Am I one to gratuitously insult or offend another? Typical this! Your cursed temper it is that keeps you back in the world and makes a failure of you,' answered the student of stones, his own temper nearly lost under exceptional provocation.

'Who says I be a failure?' roared Will in return. 'What do you know, you grey, dreamin' fule, as to whether I'm successful or not so? Get you gone off my land or——'

'I'll go, and readily enough. I believe you're mad. That's the conclusion I'm reluctantly driven to—mad. But don't for an instant imagine your lunatic stupidity is going to stand between the world and this discovery, because it isn't.'

He strapped on his satchel, picked up his stick, put his hat on straight and prepared to depart, breathing hard.

'Go,' snorted Will, 'go to your auld stones—they 'm the awnly fit comp'ny for 'e. Bruise your silly shins against 'em, an' ax 'em if a moorman's in the right or

wrong to paart wi' his gate-post to the fust fule as wants it!'

Martin Grimbald strode off without replying, and Will, in a sort of grim good humour at this victory, returned to milking his cows. The encounter, for some obscure reason, restored him to amiability. He reviewed his own dismal part in it with considerable satisfaction, and, after going indoors and eating a remarkably good breakfast, he lighted his pipe and, in the most benignant of moods, went out with a horse and cart to gather withered fern.

CHAPTER IV

MARTIN'S RAID

MRS. BLANCHARD now dwelt alone, and all her remaining interests in life were clustered about Will. She perceived that his enterprise by no means promised to fulfil the hopes of those who loved him, and realised too late that the qualities which enabled her father to wrest a living from the moorland farm were lacking in her son. He, of course, explained it otherwise, and pointed to the changes of the times and an universal fall in the price of agricultural produce. His mother cast about in secret how to help him, but no means appeared until, upon an evening some ten days after Blanchard's quarrel with Grimbald over the gate-post, she suddenly determined to visit Monks Barton and discuss the position with Miller Lyddon.

'I want to have a bit of a tell with 'e,' she said, 'pon a matter so near to your heart as mine. Awnly you've got power an' I haven't.'

'I knaw what you'm come about before you speak,'

answered the other. 'Sit you down an' us'll have a gude airing of ideas. But I'm sorry we won't get the value o' Billy Blee's thoughts 'pon the point, for he's away to-night.'

Damaris rather rejoiced than sorrowed in this circumstance, but she was too wise to say so.

'A far-thinkin' man, no doubt,' she admitted.

'He is; an' 'tis strange your comin' just this night, for Blee's away on a matter touching Will more or less an' doan't reckon to be home 'fore light.'

'What coorious fashion job be that then?'

'Caan't tell 'e the facts. I'm under a promise not to open my mouth, but theer's no gert harm. Martin Grimbald's foremost in the thing, so you may judge it ban't no wrong act, and he axed Billy to help him at my advice. You see it's necessary to force your son's hand sometimes. He'm that stubborn when his mind's fixed.'

'A firm man, an' loves his mother out the common well. A gude son, a gude husband, a gude faither, a hard worker. How many men's all that to wance, Miller?'

'He is so—all—an' yet—the man have got his faults, speaking generally.'

'That's awnly to say he be a man; an' if you caan't find words for the faults, 'tis clear they ban't worth namin'.'

'I can find words easy enough, I assure 'e; but a man's a fule to waste breath criticising the ways of a son to his mother—if so be he's a gude son.'

'What fault theer is belongs to me. I was set on his gwaine to Newtake as master, like his gran'faither afore him. I urged the step hot, and I liked the thought of it.'

'So did he—else he wouldn't have gone.'

'You caan't say that. He might have done differ'nt

but for love of me. 'Tis I as have stood in his way in this thing.'

'Doan't fret yourself with such a thought, Mrs. Blanchard; Will's the sort as steers his awn ship. Theer's no blame 'pon you. An', for that matter, if your faither saved gude money at Newtake, why caan't Will?'

'Times be changed. You've got to make two blades o' grass grow wheer wan did use, if you wants to live nowadays.'

'Hard work won't hurt him.'

'But it will if he reckons 'tis all wasted work. What's more bitter than toiling to no account, an' *knawin'* all the while you be?'

'Not all wasted work, surely?'

'They wouldn't allow it for the world. He's that gay afore me, an' Phoebe keeps a stiff upper lip tu; but I go up unexpected now an' again an' pop in unawares an' sees the truth. You with your letter or message aforehand doan't find out nothing, an' won't.'

'He'm out o' luck, I allow. What's the exact reason?'

'You'll find it in the Book same as I done. I know you set gert store 'pon the Word. Well then, "them the Lard loveth He chasteneth." That's why Will's languishin' like. 'Twon't last for ever.'

'Ah! But theer's other texts to other purpose. Not that I want 'e to dream my Phoebe's less to me than your son to you. I've got my eye on 'em, an' that's the truth; an' on my li'l grandson tu.'

'Theer'm great things buddin' in that bwoy.'

'I hope so. I set much store on him. Doan't you worrit, mother, for the party to Newtake be bound up very close wi' my happiness, an' if they was wisht, ban't me as would long be merry. I be gwaine to give master Will rope enough to hang himself, having a

grudge or two against him yet; then, when the job's done an' he's learned the hard lesson to the dregs, I'll cut un down in gude time an' preach a sarmon to him while he's in a mood to larn wisdom. He's picking up plenty of information, you be sure—things what will be useful bimebye: the value of money, the shortness o' the distance it travels, the hardness o' Moor ground, an' men's hearts, an' such like branches of larning. Let him bide an' trust me.'

The mother was rendered at once uneasy and elated by this speech. That, if only for his wife and son's sake, Will would never be allowed to fail entirely seemed good to know; but she feared, and before the patronising manner of the old man felt alarm for the future. She well knew how Will would receive any offer of assistance tendered in this spirit.

'Like your gude self so to promise; but remember he'm of a lofty mind and fiery.'

'Stiff-necked he be for certain; but he may graw quiet 'fore you think it. Nothing tames a man so quick as to see his woman an' childer folk hungry—eh? An' 'specially if 'tis thanks to his awn mistakes.'

Mrs. Blanchard flushed and felt a wave of anger surging through her breast. But she choked it down.

'You'm hard in the grain, Lyddon—so them often be who've lived over long as widow men. Theer's a power o' gude in my Will, an' your eyes will be opened to see it some day. He'm young an' hopeful by nature; an' such as him, as allus looks up to gert things, feels a come-down worse than others who be content to crawl. He'm changing, an' I knaw it, an' I've shed more'n wan tear awver it, bein' on the edge of age myself now, an' not so strong-minded as I was 'fore Chris went. He'm changing, an the gert Moor have made his blood beat slower, I reckon, an' froze his young hope a bit.'

'He's grawing aulder, that's all. 'Tis right as he should chatter less an' think more.'

'I suppose so; yet a mother feels a cold cloud come awver her heart to watch a cheel fighting the battle an' not winning it. Specially when she can awnly look on an' do nothing.'

'Doan't you fear. You'm low in spirit, else you'd never have spoke so open; but I thank you for tellin' me that things be tighter to Newtake than I guessed. You leave the rest to me. I knaw how far to let 'em go; an' if we doan't agree 'pon that question, you must credit me with the best judgment, an' not think no worse of me for helpin' in my awn way an' awn time.'

With which promise Mrs. Blanchard was contented. Surveying the position in the solitude of her home, she felt there was much to be thankful for. Yet she puzzled her heart and head to find schemes by which the Miller's charity might be escaped. She considered her own means, and pictured her few possessions sold at auction; she had already offered to go and dwell in Newtake and dispose of her cottage. But Will exploded so violently when the suggestion reached his ears that she never repeated it.

While the widow thus bent her thoughts upon her son, and gradually sank to sleep with the problems of the moment unsolved, a remarkable series of incidents made the night strange at Newtake Farm.

Roused suddenly a little after twelve o'clock by an unusual sound, Phoebe woke with a start and cried to her husband—

'Will—Will, do hark to Ship! He'm barkin' that savage!'

Will turned and growled sleepily that it was nothing, but the barking continued, so he left his bed and looked out of the window. A waning moon had just

thrust one glimmering point above the sombre flank of the hill. It ascended as he watched, dispensed a sinister illumination, and like some remote bale-fire hung above the bosom of the nocturnal Moor. His dog still barked, and in the silence Will could hear a clink and thud as it leapt to the limit of its chain. Then out of the night a lantern danced at Newtake gate, and Blanchard, his eyes now trained to the gloom, discovered several figures moving about it.

'Baggered if it ban't that damned Grimbald come arter my gate-post,' he gasped, launched instantly to high wakefulness by the suspicion. Then, dragging on his trousers, and thrusting the tail of his night-shirt inside them, he tumbled downstairs, with passion truly formidable, and hastened naked-footed through the farmyard.

Four men blankly awaited him. Ignoring their leader—none other than Martin himself—he turned upon Mr. Blee, who chanced to be nearest, and struck from his hand a pick.

'What be these blasted hookem-snivey dealings, then?' Will thundered out; 'an' who be you, you auld twisted thorn, to come here stealin' my stone in the dead o' night?'

Billy's little eyes danced in the lantern fire, and he answered hastily before Martin had time to speak.

'Well, to be plain, the moon and the dog's played us false, an' you'd best to know the truth fust as last. Mr. Grimbald's writ you two straight, fair letters 'bout this job, so he've explained to me, an' you never so much as answered neither; so, seein' this here's a right Christian cross, ban't decent it should bide head down'ards for all time. An' Mr. Grimbald have brought up a flam-new granite post, hasp an' all complete—'tis in the cart theer—an' he called on me as a discreet, aged man to help un, an' so I did; an' Peter Bassett

an' Sam Bonus here comed likewise, by my engagement, to do the heavy work an' aid in a gude deed.'

'Dig an inch, wan of 'e, and I'll shaw what's a gude deed! I doan't want no talk with you or them hulking gert fules. 'Tis you I'd ax, Martin Grimbal, by what right you'm here.'

'You wouldn't answer my letters, and I couldn't find it in my heart to leave an important matter like this. I know I wasn't wise, but you don't understand what a priceless thing this is. I thought you'd find the new one in the morning and laugh at it. For God's sake be reasonable and sensible, Blanchard, and let me take it away. There's a new post I'll have set up. It's here waiting. I can't do more.'

'But you'll do a darned sight less. Right's right, an' stealin's stealin'. You wasn't wise, as you say, far from it. You'm in the wrong now, an' you knaw it, whatever you was before. A nice bobbery! Why doan't he take my plough or one of the bullocks? Damned thieves, the lot of 'e!'

'Doan't cock your nose so high, farmer,' said Bonus, who had never spoken to Will since he left Newtake; 'tis very onhandsome of 'e to be tellin' like this to gentlefolks.'

'Gentlefolks! Gentlefolks would ax your help, wouldn't they? You, as be no better than a common poacher since I turned 'e off! You shut your mouth and go home-long, an' mind your awn business, an' keep out o' the game preserves. Law's law, as you'm like to find sooner'n most folks.'

This pointed allusion to certain rumours concerning the labourer's present way of life angered Bonus not a little, but it also silenced him.

'Law's law, as you truly say, Will Blanchard,' answered Mr. Blee, 'an' theer it do lie in a nutshell. A man's gate-post is his awn as a common, natural

gate-post; but bein' a sainted cross o' the Lard stucked in the airth upsy-down by some ancient devilry, 'tis no gate-post nor yet everyday moor-stone, but just the common property of all Christian souls.'

'You'm out o' bias to harden your heart, Mr. Blanchard, when this gentleman sez 'tis what 'tis,' ventured the man, Peter Bassett, slowly.

'An' so you be, Blanchard, an' 'tis a awful deed every ways, an' you'll larn it some day. You did ought to be merry an' glad to hear such a thing's been found 'pon Newtake. Think o' the fortune a cross o' Christ brings to 'e!'

'An' how much has it brought, you auld fule?'

'Gude or bad, you'll be a sight wuss off if you leave it wheer 'tis now you knaw. Theer'll be hell to pay if it's let bide now, sure as eggs is eggs, an' winter winter. You'll rue it; you'll gnash awver it; 'twill turn against 'e an' rot the root an' blight the ear an' starve the things an' break your heart. Mark me, you'm doin' a cut-throat deed an' killin' all your awn luck by leavin' it here an hour longer.'

But Will showed no alarm at Mr. Blee's predictions.

'Be it as 'twill, you doan't touch my stone—cross or no cross. Damn the cross! An' you tu, every wan of 'e, dirty night-birds!'

Then Martin who had waited, half hoping that Billy's argument might carry weight, spoke and ended the scene.

'We'll talk no more and we'll do no more,' he said. 'You're wrong in a hundred ways to leave this precious stone to shut a gate and keep in cows, Blanchard. But if you wouldn't heed my letters, I suppose you won't heed my voice.'

'Why the devil should I heed your letters? I told 'e wance for all, didn't I? Be I a man as changes my mind like a cheel?'

‘Crooked words won’t help ’e, farmer,’ said the stolid Bassett. ‘You ’m wrong, an’ you knaw right well you ’m wrong, an’ theer ’ll come a day of reckoning for ’e, sure’s we ’m in a Christian land.’

‘Let it come, an’ leave me to meet it. An’ now, clear out o’ this, every wan, or I’ll loose the dog ’pon ’e!’

He turned hurriedly as he spoke and fetched the bob-tailed sheep-dog on its chain. This he fastened to the stone, then watched the defeated raiders depart. Grimbald had already walked away alone, after directing that a post which he had brought to supersede the cross should be left at the side of the road. Now, having obeyed his command, Mr. Blee, Bonus, and Bassett climbed into the cart and slowly passed away homewards. The moon had risen clear of earth and threw light sufficient to show Bassett’s white smock still gleaming through the night as Will beheld his enemies depart.

Ten minutes later, while he washed his feet, the farmer told Phoebe of the whole matter including his earlier meeting with Martin, and the antiquary’s offer of money. Upon this subject his wife found herself in complete disagreement with Blanchard, and did not hesitate to say so.

‘Martin Grimbald’s so gude a friend as any man could have, an’ you didn’t ought to have bullyragged him that way,’ she declared.

‘You say that! Ban’t a man to speak his mind to thieves an’ robbers?’

‘No such thing. ’Tis a sacred stone an’ not your property at all. To refuse ten pound for it!’

‘Hold your noise, then, an’ let me mind my business my awn way,’ he answered roughly, getting back to bed; but Phoebe was roused and had no intention of speaking less than her mind.

'You'm a knaw-nought gert fule,' she said, 'an' so full of silly pride as a turkey-cock. What's the stone to you if Grimbald wants it? An' him taking such a mint of trouble to come by it. What right have you to fling away ten pounds like that, an' what's the harm to earn gude money honest? Wonder you ban't shamed to sell anything. 'Tis enough these times for a body to say wan thing for you to say t'other.'

This rebuke from a tongue that scarcely ever uttered a harsh word startled Will not a little. He was silent for half a minute, then made reply.

'You can speak like that—you, my awn wife—you, as ought to be heart an' soul with me in everything I do? An' the husband I am to 'e. Then I should reckon I be fairly alone in the world, an' no mistake—'cept for mother.'

Phœbe did not answer him. Her spark of anger was gone and she was passing quickly from temper to tears.

'Tis queer to me how short of friends I 'pear to be gettin',' confessed Will gloomily. 'I must be differ'nt to what I fancied, for I allus felt I could do with a wagon-load of friends. Yet they'm droppin' off. Coourse I knaw why well enough tu. They've had wind o' tight times to Newtake, though how they should I caan't say, for the farm's got a prosperous look to my eye, an' them as drops in dinner-time most often finds meat on the table. Strange a man what takes such level views as me should fall out wi' his elders so much.'

'Tis theer fault as often as yours; an' you've got me as well as your mother, Will; an' you've got your son. Childern knaw the gude from the bad, same as dogs, in a way hid from grawn folks. Look how the li'l thing do run to 'e 'fore anybody in the world.'

'So he do; an' if you'm wise enough to see that,

you ought to be wise enough to see I'm right 'bout the gate-post. Who's Martin Grimbald to offer me money? A self-made man same as me. Yet he might have had it an' welcome if he'd axed proper.'

'Of course, if you put it so, Will.'

'Theer's no ways else to put it as I can see.'

'But for your awn peace of mind it might be wisest to dig the cross up. I listened by the window an' heard Billy Blee tellin' of awful cusses, an' he's wise wi'out knawin' it sometimes.'

'That's all witchcraft an' stuff an' nonsense, an' you ought to knaw better, Phœbe. 'Tis as bad as setting store on the flight o' magpies, or gettin' a dead tooth from the churchyard to cure toothache, an' such like folly.'

'Ban't folly allus, Will; theer's auld tried wisdom in some ancient sayings.'

'Well, you guide your road by my light if you want to be happy. 'Tis for you I uses all my thinking brain day an' night—for your gude an' the li'l man's.'

'I knaw—I knaw right well 'tis so, dear Will, an' I'm sorry I spoke so quick.'

'I'll forgive 'e before you axes me, sweetheart. Awnly you must larn to trust me, an' theer's no call for you to fear. Us must speak out sometimes, an' I did just now, an' 'tis odds but some of them chaps, Grimbald included, may have got a pennorth o' wisdom from me.'

'So 'tis then,' she said, cuddling to him; 'an' you'll do well to sleep now; an'—an' never tell again, Will, you've got nobody but your mother while I'm above ground, 'cause it's against justice an' truth an' very terrible for me to hear.'

''Twas a thoughtless speech,' admitted Will, 'an' I'm sorry I spake it. 'Twas a hasty word an' not to be took serious.'

They slept, while the moon wove wan harmonies of ebony and silver into Newtake. A wind woke, proclaiming morning, as yet invisible; and when it rustled dead leaves or turned a chimney-cowl, the dog at the gate stirred and growled and grated his chain against the granite cross.

CHAPTER V

WINTER

As Christmas again approached adverse conditions of weather brought like anxieties to a hundred moormen beside Will Blanchard, but the widespread nature of the trouble by no means diminished his individual concern. A summer of unusual splendour had passed unblest away, for the sustained drought represented scanty hay and an aftermath of meagre description. Cereals were poor, with very little straw, and the heavy rains of November arrived too late to save acres of starved roots on high grounds. Thus the year became responsible for one prosperous product alone: rarely was it possible to dry so well those stores gathered from the peat beds. Huge fires, indeed, glowed upon many a hearth, but the glory of them served only to illumine anxious faces. A hard winter was threatened, and the succeeding spring already appeared as no vision to welcome, but a hungry spectre to dread.

Then, with the last week of the old year, winter swept westerly on hyperborean winds, and when these were passed a tremendous frost won upon the world. Day followed day of weak, clear sunshine and low temperature. The sun, upon his shortest journeys, showed a fiery face as he sulked along the stony ridges of the Moor, and gazed over the ice-chained wilderness,

the frozen waters, and the dark mosses that never froze, but lowered black, like wounds on a white skin. Dartmoor slept insensible under granite and ice; no sheep bell made music; no flocks wandered at will; only the wind moaned in the dead bells of the heather; only the foxes slunk round cot and farm; only the shaggy ponies stamped and snorted under the lee of the tors and thrust their smoking muzzles into sheltered clefts and crannies for the withered green stuff that kept life in them. Snow presently softened the outlines of the hills, set silver caps on the granite, and brought the distant horizon nearer to the eye under crystal clear atmosphere. Many a wanderer, thus deceived, plodded hopefully forward at sight of smoke above a roof-tree, only to find his bourne, that seemed so near, still weary miles away. The high Moors were a throne for death. Cold below freezing-point endured throughout the hours of light and grew into a giant when the sun and his winter glory had huddled below the hills.

Newtake squatted like a toad upon this dreary waste. Its crofts were bare and frozen two feet deep; its sycamores were naked save for snow in the larger forks, and one shivering concourse of dead leaves, where a bough had been broken untimely, and thus held the foliage. Suffering almost animate peered from its leaded windows; the building scowled; cattle lowed through the hours of day, and a steam arose from their red hides as they crowded together for warmth. Often it gleamed mistily in the light of Will's lantern when at the dead icy hour before dawn he went out to his beasts. Then he would rub their noses, and speak to them cheerfully, and note their congealed vapours where these had ascended and frozen in shining spidery hands of ice upon the walls and rafters of the byre. Fowls, silver-spangled and black, scratched

at the earth from habit, fought for the daily grain with a ferocity the summer never saw, stalked spiritless in puffed plumage about the farmyard and collected with subdued clucking upon their roosts in a barn above the farmyard carts as soon as the sun had dipped behind the hills. Ducks complained vocally, and as they slipped on the glassy pond they quacked out a mournful protest against the times.

The snow which fell did not melt, but shone under the red sunshine, powdered into dust beneath hoof and heel; while every cart rut was full of thin white ice, like ground window-glass, that cracked drily and split and tinkled to hobnails or iron-shod wheel. The snow from the house-top, thawed by the warmth within, ran dribbling from the eaves and froze into icicles as thick as a man's arm. These glittered almost to the ground and refracted the sunshine in their prisms.

Warm-blooded life suffered for the most part silently, but the inanimate fabric of the farm complained with many a creak and crack and groan in the night watches, while Time's servant the frost gnawed busily at old timbers and thrust steel fingers into brick and mortar. Only the hut circles, grey glimmering through the snow on Metherill, laughed at those cruel nights, as the Neolithic men who built them may have laughed at the desperate weather of their day; and the cross beside Blanchard's gate, though an infant in age beside them, being fashioned of like material, similarly endured. Of more lasting substance was this stone than an iron tongue stuck into it to latch the gate, for the metal fretted fast and shed rust in an orange streak upon the granite.

Where first this relic had risen, when yet its craftsman's work was perfect and before the centuries had diminished its just proportions, no living man might say. Martin Grimbald suspected that it had marked a

meeting-place, indicated some Cistercian way, commemorated a notable deed, or served to direct the moorland pilgrim upon his road to that trinity of great monasteries which flourished aforetime at Plympton, at Tavistock, at Buckland of the Monks; but between its first uprising and its last, a duration of many years doubtless extended.

The antiquary's purpose had been to rescue the relic, judge by close study of the hidden part to what date it might be assigned, then investigate the history of Newtake farm, and endeavour to trace the cross if possible. After his second repulse, however, and following upon a conversation with Phœbe, whom he met at Chagford, Martin permitted the matter to remain in abeyance. Now he set about regaining Will's friendship in a gradual and natural manner. That done, he trusted to disinter the coveted granite at some future date and set it up on sanctified ground in Chagford Churchyard, if the true nature of the relic justified that course. For the present, however, he designed no step, for his purpose was to visit the Channel Islands early in the new year, that he might probe their testimony to prehistoric times.

A winter, to cite whose parallel men looked back full twenty years, still held the land, though February had nearly run. Blanchard daily debated the utmost possibility of his resources with Phœbe, and fought the inclement weather for his early lambs. Such light as came into life at Newtake was furnished by little Will, who danced merrily through ice and snow, like a scarlet flower in his brilliant coat. The cold pleased him; he trod the slippery duck-pond in triumph, his bread-and-milk never failed. To Phœbe her maternal right in the infant seemed recompense sufficient for all those tribulations existence just now brought with it; from which conviction resulted her steady courage and

cheerfulness. Her husband's nebulous rationalism clouded Phœbe's religious views not at all. She daily prayed to Christ for her child's welfare, and went to church whenever she could, at the express command of her father. A flash of folly from Will had combined with hard weather to keep the Miller from any visit to Newtake. Mr. Lyddon, on the beginning of the great frost, had sent two pairs of thick blankets from the Monks Barton stores to Phœbe, and Will, opening the parcel during his wife's absence, resented the gift exceedingly, and returned it by the bearer with a curt message of thanks and the information that he did not need them. Much hurt, the donor turned his face from Newtake for six weeks after this incident, and Phœbe, who knew nothing of the matter, marvelled at her father's lengthy and unusual silence.

As for Will, during these black days, the steadfast good temper of his wife almost irritated him; but he saw the prime source of her courage, and himself loved their small son dearly. Once a stray journal fell into his hands, and upon an article dealing with emigration he built secret castles in the air, and grew more happy for the space of a week. His mother ailed a little through the winter, and he often visited her. But in her presence he resolutely put off gloom, spoke with sanguine tongue of the prosperity he foresaw during the coming spring, and always foretold the frost must break within four-and-twenty hours. Damaris Blanchard was therefore deceived in some measure, and when Will spent five shillings upon a photograph of his son, she felt that the Newtake prospects must at least be more favourable than she feared, and let the circumstance of the picture be generally known.

Not until the middle of March came a thaw, and then unchained waters and melted snows roared and tumbled from the hills through every coomb and valley.

Each gorge, each declivity contributed an unwonted torrent; the quaking bogs shivered as though beneath them monsters turned in sleep or writhed in agony; the hoarse cry of Teign betokened new tribulations to the ears of those who understood; and over the Moor there rolled and crowded down a sodden mantle of mist, within whose chilly heart every elevation of note vanished for days together. Wrapped in impenetrable folds were the high lands, and the gigantic vapour stretched a million dripping tentacles over forests and wastes into the valleys beneath. Now it crept even to the hearts of the woods; now it stealthily dislimned in lonely places; now it redoubled its density and dominated all things. The soil steamed and exuded vapour as a soaked sponge, and upon its surcharged surface splashes and streaks and sheets of water shone pallid and ash-coloured, like blind eyes, under the eternal mists and rains. These accumulations threw back the last glimmer of twilight and caught the first grey signal of approaching dawn; while the land, contrariwise, had welcomed night while yet wan sunsets struggled with the rain, and continued to cherish darkness long after morning was in the sky. Every rut and hollow, every scooped cup on the tors was brimming now; springs unnumbered and unknown had burst their secret places; the water floods tumbled and thundered until their rough laughter rang like a knell in the ears of the husbandmen; and beneath crocketed pinnacles of half a hundred church towers rose the mournful murmur of prayer for fair weather.

There came an afternoon in late March when Mr. Blee returned to Monks Barton from Chagford, stamped the mud off his boots and leggings, shook his brown umbrella, and entered the kitchen to find his master reading the Bible.

‘’Tis all set down, Blee,’ exclaimed Mr. Lyddon with

the triumphant voice of a discoverer. 'These latter rains be displayed in the Book, according to my theory that everything's theer!'

'Pity you didn't find 'em out afore they comed; then us might have bought the tarpaulins cheap in autumn, 'stead of payin' through the nose for 'em last month. Now 'tis fancy figures for everything built to keep out rain. Rabbit that umberella! It's springed a leak, an' the water's got down my neck.'

'Have some hot spirits, then, an' listen to this—all set out in Isaiah, forty-one—eighteen: "I will open rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water." Theer! If that ban't a picter of the present plague o' rain, what should be?'

'So 'tis; an' the fountains in the midst of the valleys be the awfulest part. Burnish it all! The high land had the worst of the winter, but we in the low coombs be gwaine to get the worst o' the spring—safe as water allus runs down-long.'

'Twill find its awn level, which the prophet knawed.'

'I wish he knawed how soon.'

'Tis in the Word, I'll wager. I may come upon it yet.'

'The airth be damn near drowned, an' the air's thick like a washin' day everywheer's, an' a terrible braave sight o' rain unshed in the elements yet.'

'Twill pass, sure as Noah seed a rainbow.'

'Ess, 'twill pass; but Monks Barton's like to be washed to Fingle Bridge fust. Oceans o' work waitin', but what can us be at? Theer ban't a bit o' land you couldn't most swim across.'

'Widespread trouble, sure 'nough—all awver the South Hams, high an' low.'

'By the same token, I met Will Blanchard an hour ago. Gwaine in the dispensary, he was. The li'l

bwoy's queer—no gert ill, but a bit of a tisseck on the lungs. He got playin' 'bout, busy as a rook, in the dirt, and caught cold.'

Miller Lyddon was much concerned at this bad news.

'Oh, my gude God!' he exclaimed, 'that's worse hearin' than all or any you could have fetched down. What do Doctor say?'

'Wasn't worth while to call un up, so Will thought. Ban't nothin' to kill a beetle, or I lay the mother of un would have Doctor mighty soon. Will reckoned to get un a dose of physic—an' a few sweeties. Nature's all for the young buds. He won't come to no hurt.'

'Fust thing morning send a lad riding to Newtake,' ordered Mr. Lyddon. 'Theer's no sleep for me to-night, no, nor any more at all till I hear tell the dear tibby-lamb's well again. 'Pon my soul, I wonder that headstrong man doan't doctor the cheel hisself.'

'Maybe he will. Ban't nothin's beyond him.'

'I'll go silly now. If awnly Mrs. Blanchard was up theer wi' Phoebe.'

'Doan't you grizzle about it. The bwoy be gwaine to make auld bones yet—hard as a nut, he be. Give un years an' he'll help carry you to the graave in fulness of time, I promise 'e,' said Billy, in his comforting way.

CHAPTER VI

THE CROSS UPREARED

MR. BLEE had but reported Will correctly, and it was not until some hours later that the child at Newtake caused his parents any alarm. Then he awoke in evident suffering, and Will, at Phoebe's frantic entreaty,

arose and was soon galloping down through the night for Doctor Parsons.

His thundering knock fell upon the physician's door, and a moment later a window above him was opened.

'Why can't you ring the bell instead of making that fiendish noise, and waking the whole house? Who is it?'

'Blanchard, from Newtake.'

'What's wrong?'

'Tis my bwoy. He've got something amiss with his breathing parts by the looks of it.'

'Ah.'

'Doan't delay. Gert fear comed to his mother under the darkness, 'cause he seemed nicely when he went to sleep, then woke up worse. So I felt us had better not wait till morning.'

'I'll be with you in five minutes.'

Soon the doctor appeared down a lane from the rear of the house. He was leading his horse by the bridle.

'I'm better mounted than you,' he said, 'so I'll push forward. Every minute saved is gained.'

Will thanked him, and Doctor Parsons disappeared.

When the father reached home, it was to hear that his child was seriously ill, though nothing of a final nature could be done to combat the sickness until it assumed a more definite form.

'It's a grave case,' said the physician drearily, in the dawn, as he pulled on his gloves and discussed the matter with Will before departing. 'I'll be up again to-night. We mustn't overlook the proverbial vitality of the young, but if you are wise, you will school your mind and your wife's to be resigned. You understand?'

He stroked his peaked naval beard, shook his head, then mounted his horse and was gone.

From that day forward life stood still at Newtake, in

so far as it is possible for life to do so, and a long-drawn weariness of many words dragged dully of a hundred pages would be necessary to reflect that tale of nocturnal terrors and daylight respites, of intermittent fears, of nerve-shattering suspense, and of the ebb and flow of hope through a fortnight of time. Overtaxed and overwrought, Phœbe ceased to be of much service in the sickroom after a week without sleep; Will did all that he could, which was little enough; but his mother took her place unquestioned in the house at this juncture, and ruled under Doctor Parsons. The struggle seemed to make her younger again, to rub off the slow-gathering rust of age and charm up all her stores of sense and energy.

So they battled for that young life. More than once a shriek from Phœbe would echo to the farm that little Will was gone; and yet he lived; many a time the child's father in his strength surveyed the perishing atom, and prayed to take the burden, all too heavy for a baby's shoulders. In one mood he supplicated, in another cursed Heaven for its cruelty.

There came a morning in early April when their physician, visiting Newtake before noon, broke it to husband and wife that the child could scarcely survive another day. He promised to return in the evening, and left them to their despair. Mrs. Blanchard, however, refused to credit this assurance, and cried to them to be hopeful still.

In the afternoon Mr. Blee rode up from Monks Barton. Daily a messenger visited Newtake for Mr. Lyddon's satisfaction, but it was not often that Billy came. Now he arrived, however, entered the kitchen, and set down a basket laden with good things. The apartment lacked its old polish and cleanliness. The whitewash was very dirty; the little eight-day clock on the mantelpiece had run down; the begonias in pots

on the window-ledge were at death's door for water. Between two of them a lean cat stretched in the sun and licked its paws; beside the fire lay Ship with his nose on the ground; and Will sat close by, a fortnight's beard upon his chin. He looked listlessly up as Mr. Blee entered and nodded but did not speak.

'Well, what's the best news? I've brought 'e fair fashioned weather at any rate. The air's so soft as milk, even up here, an' you can see the green things growin' to make up for lost time. Sun was proper hot on my face as I travelled along. How be the poor little lad?'

'Alive, that's all. Doctor's thraved un awver now.'

'Never! Yet I've knawed even Parsons to make mistakes. I've brought 'e a braave bunch o' berries, got by the gracious gudeness of Miller from Newton Abbot; also a jelly, also a bottle o' brandy—the auld stuff from down cellar. I brushed the Dartmoor dew, as 'tis called, off the bottle myself. Also a fowl for the missis.'

'No call to have come. 'Tis all awver bar the end.'

'Never say it while the child's livin'! They'm magical li'l twoads for givin' a doctor the lie. You'm wisht an' weary along o' night watchings.'

'Us must faace it. Ban't no oncommon thing. Hope's dead in me these many days; an' dying now in Phœbe—dying cruel by inches. She caan't bring herself to say "gude-bye" to the li'l darling bwoy.'

'What mother could? What do Mrs. Blanchard the elder say?'

'She plucks up 'bout it. She'm awver hopeful.'

'Doan't say so. A very wise woman her.'

Phœbe entered at this moment, and Mr. Blee turned from where he was standing by his basket.

'I be cheerin' your gude man up,' he said.

She sighed, and sat down wearily near Will.

'I've brought 'e a chick for your awn eatin', an'——'
Here a scuffle and snarling and spitting interrupted Billy. The hungry cat finding a fowl almost under its nose, had leapt to the ground with it, and the dog observed the action. Might is right in hungry communities; Ship asserted himself, and almost before the visitor realised what had happened, poor Phoebe's chicken was gone.

'Out on the blamed thieves!' cried Billy, astounded at such manners. He was going to strike the dog, but Will stopped him.

'Let un bide,' he said. 'He didn't take it, an' since it weern't for Phoebe, better him had it than the cat. He works for his livin', she doan't.'

'Such gwaines on 'mongst dumb beasts o' the field I never seen!' protested Billy; 'an' chickens worth what they be this spring!'

Presently conversation drifted into a channel that enabled the desperate, powerless man to use his brains, and employ his muscles; while for the mother it furnished a fresh gleam of hope built upon faith. Billy it was who brought about this consummation. Led by Phoebe he ascended to the sickroom and bid Mrs. Blanchard 'good-day.' She sat with the insensible child on her lap by the fire, where a long-spouted kettle sent forth jets of steam.

'This here jelly what I've brought would put life in a corpse I do b'lieve; an' them butivul grapes, tu—they'll cool his fever to rights, I should judge.'

'He'm past all that,' said Phoebe.

'Never!' cried the other woman. 'He'm a bit easier to my thinkin'.'

'Let me take un then,' said the mother. 'You'm most blind for sleep.'

'Not a bit of it. I'll have forty winks later, after Doctor's been again.'

Will here entered, sat down by his mother and stroked the child's little limp hand.

'He bain't fightin' so hard by the looks of it,' he said.

'No more he is. Come he sleep like this till dark, I lay he'll do braave.'

Nobody spoke for some minutes, then Billy, having pondered the point in silence, suddenly relieved his mind and attacked Will, to the astonishment of all present.

'Tis a black thought for you to knaw this trouble's of your awn wicked hatching, farmer,' he said abruptly; 'though it ban't a very likely time to say so, perhaps. Yet theer's life still, so I speak.'

Will glared speechless; but Billy knew himself too puny and too venerable to fear rough handling. He regarded the angry man before him without fear, and explained his allusion.

'You may glaze 'pon me, an' stick your savage eyes out your head; but that doan't alter truth. 'Tas awnly a bit ago in the fall as I told un what would awvertake un,' he continued, turning to the women. 'He left the cross what Mr. Grimbald found upsy-down in the airth; he stood up afore the company an' damned the glory of all Christian men. Ess fay, he done that fearful thing, an' if 'tweern't enough to turn the Lard's hand from un, what was? Snug an' vitty he weer afore that, so far as anybody knawed; an' since—why, troubles have tumbled 'pon each other's tails like apple-dranes out of a nest.'

The face of Phœbe was lighted with some eagerness, some deep anxiety, and not a little passion as she listened to this harangue.

'You mean that gate-stone brought this upon us?' she asked.

'No, no, never,' declared Damaris; 'tis contrary to all reason.'

'Tis true, whether or no; an' any fule, let alone a man as knaws like I do, would tell 'e the same. 'Tis common-sense if you axes me. Your man was told 'twas a blessed cross, an' he flouted the lot of us an' left it wheer 'twas. 'Tis a challenge, if you come to think of it, a-scoffin' of the A'mighty to the very face of Un. I wouldn't stand it myself if I was Him.'

'Will, do 'e hear Mr. Blee?' asked Phoebe.

'I hear un. 'Tis tu late now, even if what he said was true, which it ban't.'

'Never tu late to do a gude deed,' declared Billy; 'an' you'll have to come to it, or you'll get the skin cussed off your back afore you'm done with. Gormed if ever I seed sich a man as you! Theer be some gude points about 'e, as everything must have from God A'mighty's workshop, down to poisonous varmint. But certain sure am I that you don't ought to think twice 'pon this job.'

'Do 'e mean it might even make the differ'nce between life an' death to the bwoy?' asked Phoebe breathlessly.

'I do. Just all that.'

'Will—for God's love, Will!'

'What do 'e say, mother?'

'It may be truth. Straange things fall out. Yet it never hurted my parents in the past.'

'For why?' asked Billy. ''Cause they didn't know 'twas theer, so allowance was made by the Watching Eye. Now 'tis differ'nt, an' His rage be waxing.'

'Your blessed God's got no common-sense then—an' that's all I've got to say 'bout it. What would you have me do?'

Will put this question to Mr. Blee, but his wife it was who answered, being now worked up to a pitch of frenzy at the delay.

'Go! Dig—dig as you never digged afore! Dig

the holy stone out the ground direckly minute! Now, now, Will, 'fore the life's out of his li'l flutterin' body. Lay bare the cross, an' drag un out for God in heaven to see! Doan't stand clackin' theer, when every moment's worth more'n gawld.'

'So like's not He'll forgive 'e if 'e do,' argued Mr. Blee. 'Allowed the Lard o' Hosts grows a bit short in His temper now an' again, as with them gormed Israelites, an' sich like, an' small blame to Him; but He's all for mercy at heart, 'cordin' to the opinion of these times, so you'd best to dig.'

'Why doan't He strike me down if I've angered Him—not this innocent cheel?'

'The sins of the fathers be visited——' began Mr. Blee glibly, when Mrs. Blanchard interrupted—

'Ban't the time to argue, Will. Do it, an' do it sharp, if 'twill add wan grain o' hope to the baaby's chance.'

The younger woman's sufferings rose to a frantic half-hushed scream at the protracted delay.

'O Christ, why for do 'e hold back? Ban't anything worth tryin' for your awn son? I'd scratch the stone out wi' my raw, bleedin' finger-bones if I was a man. Do 'e want to send me mad? Do 'e want to make me hate the sight of 'e? Go—go for love of your mother, if not for me!'

'An' I'll help,' said Billy, 'an' that chap messin' about in the yard can lend a hand likewise. I be a cracked vessel myself for strength, an' past heavy work, but my best is yours to call 'pon in this pass.'

Will turned and left the sickroom without more words, while Billy followed him.

The farmer fetched two picks and a shovel, called Ted Chown, and a minute later had struck the first blow towards restoration of his granite cross. All laboured with their utmost power, and Will, who had

flung off his coat and waistcoat, bared his arms, tightened his belt, and did the work of two men. The manual labour sweetened his mind a little, and scoured it of some bitterness. While Mr. Blee, with many a grunt and groan, removed the soil as the others broke it away, Blanchard, during these moments of enforced idleness, looked hungrily at the little window of the upper chamber where all his hopes and interests were centred. Then he swung his pick again.

Presently a ray of sunlight brightened Newtake, and contributed to soothe the toiling father. He read promise into it, and when three feet below the surface, indications of cross arms appeared upon the stone, Will felt still more heartened. Grimbald's prediction was now verified; and it remained only to prove Billy's prophecy also true. His tremendous physical exertions, the bright setting sunshine, and the discovery of the cross affected Will strangely. His mind swung round from frank irreligion to a sort of superstitious credulity, awestricken yet joyful, that made him cling to the saving virtue of the stone. Because Martin had been right in his assertion concerning the gate-post, Blanchard felt a hazy conviction that Blee's estimate of the stone's virtue must also prove correct. He saw his wife at the window, and waved to her, and cried aloud that the cross was uncovered.

'A poor thing in holy relics sure 'nough,' said Billy, wiping his forehead.

'But a cross—a clear cross? Keep workin', Chown, will 'e? You still think 'twill serve, doan't 'e, Blee?'

'No room for doubt, though woful out o' repair,' answered Billy, occupied with the ancient monument. 'Just the stumps o' the arms left, but more 'n enough to swear by.'

All laboured on; then the stone suddenly subsided and fell in such a manner that with some sloping of

one side of the excavated pit they were able to drag it out.

'Something's talking to me as us have done the wan thing needful,' murmured Will, in a subdued voice, but with more light than the sunset on his face. 'Something's hurting me bad that I said what I said in the chamber, an' thought what I thought. God's nigher than us might think, minding what small creatures we be. I hope He'll forgive them words.'

'He's a peacock for eyes, as be well knawn,' declared Mr. Blee. 'An' He've got His various manners an' customs o' handlin' the human race. Some He softens wi' gude things an' gude fortune till they be bound to turn to Him for sheer shame; others He breaks 'pon the rocks of His wrath till they falls on their knees an' squeals for forgiveness. I've seed it both ways scores o' times; an' if your little lad's spared to 'e, you'll be brought to the Lard by a easier way than you deserved, Blanchard.'

'I knaw, I knaw, Mr. Blee. H'm surely gwaine to let us keep li'l Willy, an' win us to heaven for all time.'

The cross now lay at their feet, and Billy was about to return to the house and see how matters prospered, when Will bade him stay a little longer.

'Not yet,' he said.

'What more's to do?'

'I feel a kind o' message like to set it up plumb-true under the sky. Us caan't lift it, but if I pull a plank or two out o' the pig's house an' put a harrow chain round 'em, we could get the cross on an' let a horse pull un up theer to the hill, and set un up. Then us would have done all man can.'

He pointed to the bosom of the adjacent hill, now glowing in great sunset light.

'Starve me! but you'm wise. Us'll set the thing up

under the A'mighty's eye. 'Twill serve—mark my words. 'Twill turn the purpose of the Lard o' Hosts, or I'm no prophet.'

'Tis in my head you 'm right. I be lifted up in a way I never was.'

'The Lard's found thee by the looks of it,' said Billy critically, 'either that, or you 'm light-headed for want of sleep. But truly I think He 've called 'e. Now 'tis for you to answer.'

They cleaned the cross with a bucket or two of water, then dragged it half-way up the hill, and, where a rabbit burrow lessened labour, raised their venerable monument under the after-glow.

'It do look as if it had been part o' the view for all time,' declared Ted Chown, as the party retreated a few paces; and indeed, the stone rose harmoniously upon its new site, and might have stood an immemorial feature of the scene.

Blanchard stayed not a moment when the work was done, but strode to Newtake like a jubilant giant, while Mr. Blee and Chown, with the horse, tools, and rough sledge, followed more slowly.

The father proceeded homewards at tremendous speed, and glorious hope filled his heart, sharing the same with sorrow and repentance. He mumbled shamefaced prayers as he went, speaking half to himself, half to Heaven. He rambled on from a petition for forgiveness into a broken thanksgiving for the mercy he already regarded as granted. His labours, the glamour of the present achievement, and the previous long strain upon his mind and body, united to smother reason for one feverish hour. Will walked blindly forward, now with his eyes upon the window under Newtake's dark roof below him, now turning to catch sight of the grey cross uplifted on the hill above. A great sweeping sea of change was tumbling through

his intellect, and old convictions with scraps of assured wisdom suffered shipwreck in it. His mind was exalted before the certainty of unutterable blessing; his soul clung to the splendid assurance of a Personal God who had wrought actively upon his behalf, and received his belated atonement.

Far behind, Mr. Blee was improving the occasion for benefit of young Ted Chown.

'See how he do stride the hill wi' his head held high, same as Moses when he went down-long from the Mount. Look at un an' do likewise, Teddy; for theer goes a man as have grasped God! 'Tis a gert, gay day in human life when it comes.'

Will Blanchard hurried through the farm gate, where it swung idly with its sacred support gone for ever; then he drew a great breath and glanced upwards before proceeding into the darkness of the unlighted house. As he did so wheels grated at the entrance, and he knew that Doctor Parsons must be just behind him. Above stairs the sickroom was still unlighted, the long-necked kettle still puffed steam, but the fire had shrunk, and Will's first word was a protest that it had been allowed to sink so low. Then he looked round, and the rainbow in his heart faded and died. Damaris sat like a stone woman by the window; Phœbe lay upon the bed and hugged a little body in a blanket. Her hair had fallen down; out of the great shadows he saw the white blur of her face, and heard her voice sound strange as she cried monotonously, in a tone from which the first passion had vanished through an hour of dreary iteration.

'O God, give un back to me! O God, spare un! O kind God, give my li'l bwoy back!'

CHAPTER VII

GREY TWILIGHT

IN the soft earth they laid him, 'the little child whose heart had fallen asleep,' and from piling of a miniature mound, from a small brown tumulus, now quite hid under primroses, violets, and the white anemones of the woods, Will Blanchard and his mother slowly returned to Newtake. He wore his black coat; she was also dressed in black; the solitary mourning coach dragged slowly up the hill to the Moor, and elsewhere another like it conveyed Mr. Lyddon homeward.

Neither mother nor son had any heart to speak. The man's soul was up in arms; he had rebelled against his life, and since the death of his boy, while Phœbe remained inert in her desolation and languished under a mental and bodily paralysis, wherein she had starved to death but for those about her, he, on the contrary, found muscle and mind clamouring for heroic movement. He was feverishly busy upon the farm, and ranged in thought with a savage activity among the great concerns of men. His ill-regulated mind, smarting under the blows of Chance, whirled from that past transient wave of superstitious emotion into an opposite extreme. Now he was ashamed of his weakness, and suffered convictions proper to the narrowness of an immature intellect to overwhelm him. He assured himself that his tribulations were not compatible with the existence of a Supreme Being. Like poor humanity the wide world over, his judgment became vitiated, his views distorted under the stroke of personal sorrow, and beneath the pressure of that gigantic egotism which ever palsies the mind of man at sudden loss

of what he holds dearest upon earth, poor Blanchard cried in his heart there was no God.

Here we are faced with a curious parallel, offered within the limits of this narrative. As the old labourer, Blee, had arrived at the same conclusion, then modified it and returned to a creed in the light of subsequent events, so now Will found himself, on the evening of his child's funeral, with fresh interests aroused and recent convictions shaken. An incipient negation of Deity, built upon the trumpery basis of his personal misfortunes, was almost shattered within the week that saw its first existence. A mystery developed in his path, and startling incidents awoke a new train of credulity akin to that already manifested over the ancient cross. The man's uneven mind was tossed from one extremity of opinion to the other, and that element of superstition, from which no untutored intellect in the lap of Nature is free, now found fresh food and put forth a strong root within him.

Returning home, Will approached Phoebe with a purpose to detail the said short scene in Chagford Churchyard, but his voice rendered her hysterical, so he left her with his mother, put on his working clothes, and wandered out into the farmyard. Presently he found himself idly regarding a new gate-post—that which Martin Grimbald formerly brought and left hard by the farm. Ted Chown had occupied himself in erecting it during the morning.

The spectacle reminded Will of another, and he lifted his eyes to the cross on the undulation spread before him. As he did so some object appeared to flutter out of sight not far above it, among the rocks and loose 'clatters' beneath the summit of the tor. This incident did not hold Will's mind, but, prompted to motion, restless, and in the power of dark thoughts, he wandered up the Moor, tramped through the heather,

and unwittingly passed within a yard of the monument he had raised upon the hill. He stood a moment and looked at the cross, then cursed and spat upon it. The action spoke definitely of a mental chaos unexampled in one who, until that time, had never lacked abundant self-respect. His deed done, it struck Will Blanchard like a blow; he marvelled bitterly at himself, he knew such an act was pitiful, and remembered that the brain responsible for it was his own. Then he clenched his hands and turned away, and stood and stared out over the world.

A wild, south-west wind blew, and fitful rain-storms sped separately across the waste. Over the horizon clouds massed darkly, and the wildernesses spread beneath them were of an inflamed purple. The seat of the sun was heavily obscured at this moment, and the highest illumination cast from sky to earth broke from the north. The effect thus imparted to the scene, though in reality no more than unusual, affected the mind as unnatural, and even sinister in its operation of unwonted chiaro-oscuro. Presently the sullen clearness of the distance was swept and softened by a storm. Another, falling some miles nearer, became superimposed upon it. Immediately the darkness of the horizon lifted and light generally increased, though every outline of the hills themselves vanished under falling rain. The turmoil of the clouds proceeded, and after another squall had passed there followed an aerial battle amid towers and pinnacles and tottering precipices of sheer gloom. The centre of illumination wheeled swiftly round to the sun as the storm travelled north, then a few huge silver spokes of wan sunshine turned irregularly upon the stone-strewn desert.

Will watched this elemental unrest, and it served to soothe that greater storm of sorrows and self-condemnation then raging within him. His nature found

consolation here, the cool hand of the Mother touched his forehead as she passed in her robe of rain, and for the first time since childhood the man hid his face and wept.

Presently he moved forward again, walked to the valleys and wandered towards Southern Teign, unconsciously calmed by his own random movements and the river's song. Anon, he entered the lands of Metherill, and soon afterwards, without deliberate intention, moved through that Damnonian village which lies there. A moment later and he stood in the hut circle where he himself had been born. Its double stone courses spread around him, hiding the burrows of the rabbits; and sprung from between two granite blocks, brave in spring verdure, with the rain twinkling in little nests of flower-buds as yet scarcely visible, there rose a hawthorn. Within the stones a ewe stood and suckled its young, but there was no other sign of life. Then Blanchard, sitting here to rest and turning his eyes whither he had come, again noticed some sudden movement, but looking intently at the spot, he saw nothing and returned to his own thoughts. Sitting motionless Will retraced the brief course of his career through long hours of thought; and though his spirit bubbled to white heat more than once during the survey, yet subdued currents of sense wound amid his later reflections. Crushed for a moment under the heavy load of life and its lessons, he presented a picture familiar enough, desirable enough, necessary enough to all humanity, yet pathetic as exemplified in the young and unintelligent and hopeful. It was the picture of the dawn of patience—a patience sprung from no religious inspiration, but representing Will's tacit acknowledgment of defeat in his earlier battles with the world. The emotion did not banish his present rebellion against Fate and evil fortune un-

deserved; but it caused him to look upon life from a man's standpoint rather than a child's, and did him a priceless service by shaking to their foundations his self-confidence and self-esteem. Selfish at least he was not from a masculine standard, and now his thoughts returned to Phœbe in her misery, and he rose and retraced his steps with a purpose to comfort her if he could.

The day began to draw in. Unshed rains massed on the high tors, but towards the west one great band of primrose sky rolled out above the vanished sun and lighted a million little amber lamps in the hanging crystals of the rain. They twinkled on thorns and briars, on the grass, the silver crosiers of uncurling ferns, and all the rusty-red young heather.

Then it was that rising from his meditations and turning homeward, the man distinctly heard himself called from some distance. A voice repeated his name twice—in clear tones that might have belonged to a boy or a woman.

‘Will! Will!’

Turning sharply upon a challenge thus ringing through absolute loneliness and silence, Blanchard endeavoured, without success, to ascertain from whence the summons came. He thought of his mother, then of his wife, yet neither was visible, and nobody appeared. Only the old time village spread about him with its hoary granite peering from under caps of heather and furze, ivy and upspringing thorn. And each stock and stone seemed listening with him for the repetition of a voice. The sheep had moved elsewhere, and he stood companionless in that theatre of vanished life. Trackways and circles wound grey around him, and the spring vegetation above which they rose all swam into one dim shade, yet moved with shadows under oncoming darkness. Attributing the

voice to his own unsettled spirit, Blanchard proceeded upon his road to where the skeleton of a dead horse stared through the gloaming beside a quaking bog. Its bones were scattered by ravens, and Will used the bleached skull as a stepping stone. Presently he thought of the flame tongues that here were wont to dance through warm summer nights. This memory recalled his own nickname in Chagford—'Jack-o'-Lantern'—and, for the first time in his life, he began to appreciate its significance. Then, being a hundred yards from his starting-place in the hut circle, he heard the hidden voice again. Clear and low, it stole over the intervening wilderness, and between two utterances was an interval of some seconds.

'Will! Will!'

For one instant the crepitation of fear passed over Blanchard's scalp and skin. He made an involuntary stride away from the voice; then he shook himself free of alarm, and, not desirous to lose more self-respect that day, turned resolutely and shouted back—

'I hear 'e! What's the business? I be comin' to 'e if you'll bide wheer you be.'

That some eyes were watching him out of the gathering darkness he did not doubt, and soon pushing back, he stood once more in the ruined citadel of old stones, mounted one, steadied himself by a young ash that rose beside it, and raised his voice again—

'Now, then! I be here. What's to do? Who's callin' me?'

An answer came, but of a sort widely different from what he expected. There rose, within twenty yards of him, a sound that might have been the cry of a child or the scream of a trapped animal. Assuming it to be the latter, Will again hesitated. Often enough he had laughed at the folk-tales of witch hares as among the most fantastic fables of the old; yet at this present

moment mystic legends won point from the circumstances in which he found himself. He hurried forward to the edge of a circle from which the sound proceeded. Then, looking before him, he started violently, sank to his knees behind a rock, and so remained, glaring into the ring of stones.

In less than half an hour Blanchard, with his coat wrapped round some object that he carried, returned to Newtake and summoned assistance with a loud voice.

Presently his wife and mother entered the kitchen, whereupon Will discovered his burden and revealed a young child. Phoebe fainted dead away at sight of it, and while her husband looked to her Mrs. Blanchard tended the baby, which was hungry but by no means alarmed. As for Will, his altered voice and most unusual excitement of manner indicated something of the shock he had received. Having described the voice which called him, he proceeded after this fashion to detail what followed.

'I looked in the very hut circle I was born, an' I shivered all over, for I thought 'twas the li'l ghost of our wee bwoy—by God, I did! It sat theer all alone, an' I stared an' froze while I stared. Then it hollered like a gude un an' stretched out its arms, an' I seed 'twas livin' an' picked it up, an' never thought how it comed theer. He'm somethin' smaller than our purty darling, yet like him in a way, onless I'm forgetting.'

'Tis like,' said Damaris, handling the child and making it happy. 'Tis a li'l bwoy, two year old or more, I should guess. It keeps cryin' "mam, mam," for its mother. God forgive the woman.'

'A gipsy's baby, I reckon,' said Phoebe languidly.

'I doan't think it,' answered her husband; 'I'm

most feared to guess what 'tis. Wan thing's sure: I was called loud an' clear or I'd never have turned back; an' yet, second time I was called, my flesh crept.'

'The little flannels an' frock be thick an' gude, but they doan't shaw nought.'

'The thing's most as easy to think a miracle as not. He looked up in my eyes as I brought un away, an' after he'd got used to me he was quiet as a mouse an' snuggled to me.'

'They'd have said 'twas a fairy changeling in my young days,' mused Mrs. Blanchard, 'but us knaws better now. 'Tis a li'l gipsy, I'll warn 'e, an' some wicked mother's dropped un under your nose to ease her conscience.'

'What will you do? take un to the poorhouse?' asked Phoebe.

'"Poorhouse"! Never! This be mine tu! Mine! I was called to it, weern't I? By a human voice or another, God knaws. Theer's more to this than us can see.'

His women regarded him with blank amazement, and he showed considerable impatience under their eyes. It was clear he desired that they should dwell on no purely materialistic or natural explanation of the incident.

'Baan't a gipsy baaby,' he said; 'tis awnly the legs an' arms of un as be brown. His body's white as curds, an' his hair's no darker than our awn Willy's was.'

'If ban't a gipsy's, whose be it?' said Phoebe, turning to the infant for the first time.

'Mine now,' answered Will stoutly. ''Twas sent an' give into my awn hand by one what knawed who 'twas they called. My heart warmed to un as he lay in my arms, an' he'm mine hencefarrard.'

'What do 'e say, Phœbe?' asked Mrs. Blanchard, somewhat apprehensively. She knew full well how any such project must have struck her if placed in the bereaved mother's position. Phœbe, however, made no immediate answer. Her sorrowful eyes were fixed on the child, now sitting happily on the elder woman's lap.

'A nice li'l thing, wi' a wunnerful curly head—eh, Phœbe? Seems more'n chance to me comin' as it have on this night-black day. An' like our li'l angel tu in a way?' asked Will.

'Like him—in a way, but more like you,' she answered; 'more like you than your awn was—terrible straange that—the living daps o' Will! Ban't it?'

Damaris regarded her son, and then the child.

'He be like—very,' she admitted. 'I see him strong. An' to think he found the bwoy 'pon that identical spot wheer he fust drawed breath himself!'

''Tis a thing of hidden meaning,' declared Will. 'An' he looked at me kindly fust he seed me; 'twas awnly hunger made un shout—not no fear o' me. My heart warmed to un as I told 'e. An' to come this day!'

Phœbe had taken the child, and was looking over its body, in a half-dazed fashion, for the baby marks she knew. Silently she completed the survey, but there was neither caress in her fingers nor softness in her eyes. Presently she put the child back on Mrs. Blanchard's lap and spoke, still regarding it with a sort of dull, almost vindictive astonishment.

'Terrible coorious! Ban't no child as ever I seed or heard tell of; an' nothin' of my dead lamb 'bout it now I scans closer. But so like to Will! God! I can see un lookin' out o' its baaby eyes!'

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

A WANDERER RETURNS

RIPE hay swelled in many a silver-russet billow, all brightened by the warm red of sorrel under sunshine. When the wind blew, ripples raced over the bending grasses, and from their midst shone out mauve scabious and flashed occasional poppies. The hot July air trembled a gleam with shining insects, and drowsily over the hayfield, punctuated by stridulation of innumerable grasshoppers, there throbbed one sustained murmur, like the remote and mellow music of wood and strings. A lark still sang, and the swallows, whose full-fledged young thrust open beaks from the nests under Newtake eaves, skimmed and twittered above the grass lands, or sometimes dipped a purple wing in the still water where the irises grew.

Blanchard and young Ted Chown had set about their annual labour of saving the hay, and now a rhythmic breathing of two scythes and merry clink of whetstones against steel sounded afar on the sleepy summer air. The familiar music came to Phœbe's ear where she sat at an open kitchen window of Newtake. Her custom was at times of hay harvest to assist in the drying of the grass, and few women handled a

hay-fork better; but there had recently reached the farm an infant girl, and the mother had plenty to do without seeking beyond her cradle.

Phœbe made no demur about receiving Will's little foundling of the hut circle. His heart's desire was usually her ambition also, and though Timothy, as the child had been called, could boast no mother's love, yet Phœbe proved a kind nurse, and only abated her attention upon the arrival of her own daughter. Then, as time softened the little mound in Chagford Churchyard with young green, so before another baby did the mother's bereavement soften, sink deeper into memory, revive at longer intervals to conjure tears. Her character, as was indicated, admitted of no supreme sustained sorrow. Suffer she did, and fiery was her agony; but another child brought occupation and new love; while her husband, after the first sentimental outburst of affection over the infant he had found at Metherill, settled into an enduring regard for him, associated him, by some mental process impossible of explanation, with his own lost one, and took an interest, blended of many curious emotions, in the child.

Drying hay soon filled the air with a pleasant savour, and stretched out grey-green ribbons along the emerald of the shorn meadows. Chown snuffled and sweated and sneezed, for the pollen always gave him hay-fever; his master daily worked like a giant from dawn till the owl-light, drank gallons of cider, and performed wonders with the scythe. A great hay crop gladdened the moormen, and Will, always intoxicated by a little fair fortune, talked much of his husbandry, already calculated the value of the aftermath, and reckoned what number of beasts he might feed next winter.

'Most looks as if I'd got a special gift wi' hay,' he said to his mother on one occasion. She had let her

cottage to holiday folk, and was spending a month on the Moor.

Mrs. Blanchard surveyed the scene from under her sun-bonnet and nodded.

'Spare no trouble, no trouble, an' have it stacked come Saturday. Theer'll be thunder an' gert rains after this heat. Be the rushes ready for thatchin' of it?'

'Not yet; but that's not to say I've forgot.'

'I'll cut some for 'e myself come the cool of the evenin'. An' you can send Ted with the cart to gather 'em up.'

'No, no, mother. I'll make time to-morrow.'

'Twill be gude to me, an' like auld days, when I was a li'l maid. You sharp the sickle an' fetch the skeiner out tu, for I was a quick hand at bindin' ropes o' rushes, an' have made many a yard of 'em in my time.'

Then she withdrew from the tremendous sunshine, and Will, now handling a rake, proceeded with his task.

Two days later a rick began to rise majestically at the corner of Blanchard's largest field, while round about it was gathered the human life of the farm. Phœbe, with her baby, sat on an old sheepskin rug in the shadow of the growing pile; little Tim rollicked unheeded with Ship in the sweet grass, and clamoured from time to time for milk from a glass bottle; Will stood up aloft and received the hay from Chown's fork, while Mrs. Blanchard, busy with the 'skeiner' stuck into the side of the rick, wound stout ropes of rushes for the thatching.

Then it was that Will, glancing out upon the Moor, observed a string of gipsy folk making slow progress towards Chagford. Among the various Romany cavalades which thus passed Newtake in summer time

this appeared not the least strange. Two ordinary caravans headed the procession. A man conducted each, a naked-footed child or two trotted beside them, and an elder boy led along three goats. The travelling homes were encumbered with osier and cane work, and following them came a little broken-down, open vehicle. This was drawn by two donkeys, harnessed tandem-fashion, and the chariot had been painted bright blue. A woman drove the concern, and in it appeared a knife-grinding machine and a basket of cackling poultry, while some tent poles stuck out behind. Will laughed at this spectacle, and called his wife's attention to it, whereon Phœbe and Damaris went as far as the gate of the hayfield to win a nearer view. The gipsies, however, had already passed, but Mrs. Blanchard found time to observe the sky-blue carriage and shake her head at it.

'What gwaines on! Theer's no master minds 'mongst them people nowadays,' she said. 'Your faither wouldn't have let his folk make a show of themselves like that.'

'They'm mostly chicken stealers nowadays,' declared Will; 'an' so surly as dogs if you tell 'em to go 'bout their business.'

'Not to none o' your name—never,' declared his mother. 'No gipsy's gwaine to forget my husband in his son's time. Many gude qualities have they got, chiefly along o' living so much in the awpen air.'

'An' gude appetites for the same cause! Go after Tim, wan of 'e. He've trotted down the road half a mile, an' be runnin' arter that blue concern as if 'twas a circus. Theer! Blamed if that damned gal in the thing ban't stoppin' to let un catch up! Now he'm feared, an' have turned tail an' be coming back. 'Tis all right; Ship be wi' un.'

Presently the greater of Will's two ricks approached

completion, and all the business of thatch and spar gads and rush ropes begun. At his mother's desire he wasted no time, and toiled on, long after his party had returned to Newtake; but with the dusk he made an end for that day, stood up, rested his back, and scanned the darkening scene before descending.

At evening-tide there had spread over the jagged western outlines of the Moor an orange-tawny sunset, whereon the solid masses of the hills burnt into hazy gold, all fairy-bright, unreal, unsubstantial as a cloud island above them, whose solitary and striated shore shone purple through molten fire.

Detail vanished from the Moor; dim and dimensionless it spread to the transparent splendour of the horizon, and its eternal attributes of great vastness, great loneliness, great silence reigned together unfretted by particulars. Gathering gloom diminished the wide glory of the sky, and slowly robbed the pageant of its colour. Then rose each hill and undulation in a different shade of night, and every altitude mingled into the outlines of its neighbour. Nocturnal mists, taking grey substance against the darkness of the lower lands, wound along the rivers, and defined the depths and ridges of the valleys. Moving waters, laden with a last waning gleam, glided from beneath these vapoury exhalations, and even trifling rivulets, now invisible save for chance splash of light, lacked not mystery as they moved from darkness into darkness with a song. Stars twinkled above the dewy sleep of the earth, and there brooded over all things a prodigious peace, broken only by batrachian croakings from afar.

These phenomena Will Blanchard observed; then yellow candle fires twinkled from the dark mass of the farmhouse, and he descended in splendid weariness and strode to supper and to bed.

Yet not much sleep awaited the farmer, for soon after midnight a gentle patter of small stones at his window awakened him. Leaping from his bed and looking into the darkness he saw a vague figure that raised its hand and beckoned without words. Fear for the hay was Will's first emotion, but no indication of trouble appeared. Once he spoke, and as he did so the figure beckoned again, then approached the door. Blanchard went down to find a woman waiting for him, and her first whispered word made him start violently and drop the candle and matches that he carried. His ears were opened and he knew Chris without seeing her face.

'I be come back—back home-along, brother Will,' she said very quietly. 'I looked for mother to home, but found she weern't theer. An' I be sorry to the heart for all the sorrow I've brought 'e both. But it had to be. Strange thoughts an' voices was in me when Clem went, an' I had to hide myself or drown myself—so I went.'

'God's gudeness! Lucky I be made o' strong stuff, else I might have thought 'e a ghost an' no less. Come in out the night, an' I'll light a candle. But speak soft. Us must break this very gentle to mother.'

'Say you'll forgive me, will 'e? Can 'e do it? If you knawed half you'd say "Yes." I'm grawd a auld, cold-hearted woman, wi' a grey hair here an' theer a'ready.'

'So've I got wan an' another tu, along o' worse sorrow than yours. Leastways as bad as yourn. Forgive 'e? A thousand times, an' thank Heaven you'm livin'. Wheer ever have 'e bided? An' me an' Grimbald searched the South Hams, an' North tu, inside out for 'e, an' he put notices in the papers—dozens of 'em.'

'Along with the gipsy folk for more'n three year

now. 'Twas the movin' an' rovin', and the opening my eyes on new things that saved me from gwaine daft. Sometimes us comed through Chagford, an' then I'd shut my eyes tight an' lie in the van, so's not to see the things his eyes had seen—so's not to knaw when us passed the cottage he lived in. But now I've got to feel I could come back again.'

'You might have writ to say how you was faring.'

'I didn't dare. You'd bin sure to find me, an' I didn't want 'e to then. 'Tis over an' done, an' 'twas for the best.'

'You'm a woman, an' can say them silly words, an' think 'em true in your heart, I s'pose. "For the best!" I caan't see much that happens for the best under my eyes. Will 'e have bite or sup?'

'No, nothin'. You get back to your bed. Us'll talk in the marnin'. I'll bide here. You and Phœbe be well, an'—an' dear mother?'

'We'm well. You doan't ax me after the fust cheel Phœbe had.'

'I knaw. I put some violets theer that very night. We were camped just above Chagford, not far from here.'

'Theer's a li'l gal now, an' a bwoy as I'll tell 'e about bimebye. A sheer miracle 'twas that falled out the identical day I buried my Willy. No natural fashion of words can explain it. But that'll keep. Now let me look at 'e. Fuller in the body seemin'ly, an' gipsy-brown, by God! So brown as me every bit. Well, well, I caan't say nothin'. I'm carried off my legs wi' wonder, an' joy tu for that matter. Next to Phœbe and mother I allus loved 'e best. Gimme a kiss. What a woman, to be sure! Like a thief in the night you went, same way you've comed back. Why couldn't 'e wait till marnin'?''

'The childer—they grawed to love me that dear—

also the men an' women. They've been gude to me beyond power o' words for faither's sake. They knawed I was gwaine, an' I left 'em asleep. 'Twas how they found me when I runned away. I falled asleep from weariness on the Moor, an' they woke me, an' I thrawed in my lot with them from the day I left that pencil-written word for 'e on the window-ledge.'

'Me bein' in the valley lookin' for your drowned body the while! Women 'mazes me more the wiser I grow. Come this way, to the linhay. There's a sweet bed o' dry fern in the loft, and you must keep out o' sight till mother's told cunning. I'll hit upon a way to break it to her so soon as she's rose. An' if I caan't, Phœbe will. Come along quiet. An' I be gwaine to lock 'e in, Chris, if 'tis all the same to you. For why? Because you might fancy the van folks was callin' to 'e, an' grow hungry for the rovin' life again.'

She made no objection, and asked one more question as they went to the building.

'How be Mrs. Hicks, my Clem's mother?'

'Alive; that's all. A poor auld bed-lier now; just fading away quiet. But weak in the head as a baaby. Mother sees her now an' again. She never talks of nothin' but snuff. 'Tis the awnly brightness in her life. She's forgot everythin' 'bout the past, an' if you went to see her, she'd hold out her hand an' say, "Got a little bit o' snuff for a auld body, dearie?" an' that's all.'

They talked a little longer; while Will shook down a cool bed of dry fern—not ill-suited to the sultry night. Then Chris kissed him again, and he locked her in and returned to Phœbe.

Though the wanderer presently slept peacefully enough, there was little more repose that night for her brother or his wife. Phœbe herself became much affected by the tremendous news. Then they talked

into the early dawn before any promising mode of presenting Chris to her mother occurred to them. At breakfast Will followed a suggestion of Phoebe's, and sensibly lessened the shock of his announcement.

'A mazin' wonnerful dream I had last night,' he began abruptly. 'I thought as I was roused long arter midnight by a gert knocking, an' I went down house an' found a woman at the door. "Who be you?" I sez. "Why, I be Chris, brother Will," she speaks back, "Chris, come home-along to mother an' you." Then I seed it was her sure enough, an' she telled me all about herself, an' how she 'd dwelt wi' gipsy people. Natural as life it weer, I assure 'e.'

This parable moved Mrs. Blanchard more strongly than Will expected. She dropped her piece of bread and dripping, grew pale, and regarded her son with frightened eyes. Then she spoke.

'Tell me true, Will; doan't 'e play with a mother 'bout a life an' death thing like her cheel. I heard voices in the night, an' thought 'twas a dream—but—oh, bwoy, not Chris, not our awn Chris!—'twould 'most kill me for pure joy, I reckon.'

'Listen to me, mother, an' eat your food. Us won't have no waste here, as you knaw very well. I haven't tawld 'e the end of the story. Chris, 'peerin' to be back again, I thinks, "this will give mother palpitations, though 'tis quite a usual thing for a darter to come back to her mother," so I takes her away to the linhay for the night an' locks her in; an' if 'twas true, she might be theer now, an' if it weern't—'

Damaris rose, and held the table as she did so, for her knees were weak under her.

'I be strong—strong to meet my awn darter. Gimme the key, quick—the key, Will—do 'e hear me, child?'

'I'll come along with 'e.'

'No, I say. What! Ban't I a young woman still? 'Twas awnly essterday Chris comed in the world. You just bide with Phœbe, an' do what I tell 'e.'

Will handed over the key at this order, and Mrs. Blanchard, grasping it without a word, passed unsteadily across the farmyard. She fumbled at the lock, and dropped the key once, but picked it up quickly before Will could reach her, then she unfastened the door and entered.

CHAPTER II

HOPE RENEWED

JOHN GRIMBAL'S desires toward Blanchard lay dormant, and the usual interests of life filled his mind. The attitude he now assumed was one of sustained patience and observation; and it may best be described in words of his own employment.

Visiting Drewsteignton, about a month after the return of Chris Blanchard to her own, the man determined to extend his ride and return by devious ways. He passed, therefore, where the unique Devonian cromlech stands hard by Bradmere pool. A lane separates this granite antiquity from the lake below, and as John Grimbald rode between them, his head high enough to look over the hedge, he observed a ladder raised against the Spinsters' Rock, as the cromlech is called, and a man with a tape-measure sitting on the cover stone.

It was the industrious Martin, home once again. After his difference with Blanchard, the antiquary left Devon for another tour in connection with his work, and had devoted the past six months to study of

prehistoric remains in Guernsey, Herm, and other of the Channel Islands.

Before departing, he had finally regained his brother's friendship, though the close fraternal amity of the past appeared unlikely to return between them. Now John recognised Martin, and his first impulse produced pleasure, while his second was one of irritation. He felt glad to see his brother; he experienced annoyance that Martin should thus return to Chagford and not call immediately at the Red House.

'Hullo! Home again! I suppose you forgot you had a brother?'

'John, by all that's surprising? Forget? Was it probable? Have I so many flesh and blood friends to remember? I arrived yesterday and called on you this morning, only to find you were at Drewsteignton; so I came to verify some figures at the cromlech, hoping we might meet the sooner.'

He was beside his brother by this time, and they shook hands over the hedge.

'I'll leave the ladder and walk by you and have a chat.'

'It's too hot to ride at a walk. Come you here to Bradmere Pool. We can lie down in the shade by the water, and I'll tether my horse for half an hour.'

Five minutes later the brothers sat under the shadow of oaks and beeches at the edge of a little tarn set in fine foliage.

'Pleasant to see you,' said Martin. 'And looking younger I do think. It's the open air. I'll wager you don't get slimmer in the waist-belt though.'

'Yes, I'm all right.'

'What's the main interest of life for you now?'

John reflected before answering.

'Not quite sure. Depends on my mood. Just been buying a greyhound bitch at Drewsteignton. I'm

going coursing presently. A kennel will amuse me. I spend most of my time with dogs. They never change. I turn to them naturally. But they over-rate humanity.'

'Our interests are so different. Yet both belong to the fresh air and the wild places remote from towns. My book is nearly finished. I shall publish in a year's time, or even less.'

'Have you come back to stop!'

'Yes, for good and all now.'

'You have found no wife in your wanderings?'

'No, John. I shall never marry. That was the dark spot in my life, as it was in yours. We both broke our shins over that.'

'I broke nothing but another man's bones.'

He was silent for a moment, then proceeded abruptly on this theme.

'The old feeling is pretty well dead though. I look on and watch the man ruining himself; I see his wife getting hard-faced and thin, and I wonder what magic was in her, and am quite content. I wouldn't kick him a yard quicker to the devil if I could. I watch him drift there.'

'Don't talk like that, dear old chap. You're not the man you pretend to be, and pretend to think yourself. Don't sour your nature so. Let the past lie and go into the world and end this lonely existence.'

'Why don't you?'

'The circumstances are different. I am not a man for a wife. You are, if ever there was one.'

'I had him within a hair's-breadth once,' resumed the other inconsequently. 'Blanchard, I mean. There's a secret against him. You didn't know that, but there is. Some black devilry for all I can tell. But I missed it. Perhaps if I knew it would quicken up my spirit and remind me of all the brute made me endure.'

'Yet you say the old feeling is dead!'

'So it is—starved. Hicks knew. He broke his neck an hour too soon. It was like a dream of a magnificent banquet I had some time ago. I woke with my mouth watering, just as the food was uncovered, and I felt so damned savage at being done out of the grub that I got up and went down-stairs and had half a pint of champagne and half a cold roast partridge! I watch Blanchard go down the hill—that's all. If this knowledge had come to me when I was boiling, I should have used it to his utmost harm of course. Now I sometimes doubt, even if I could hang the man, whether I should take the trouble to do it.'

'Get away from him, and all thought of him.'

'I do. He never crosses my mind unless he crosses my eyes. I ride past Newtake occasionally, and see him sweating and slaving and fighting the Moor. Then I laugh, as you laugh at a child building sand castles against an oncoming tide. Poor fool!'

'If you pity, you might find it in your heart to forgive.'

'My attitude is assured. We will call it one of mere indifference. You made up that row over the gatepost when his first child died, didn't you?'

'Yes, yes. We shall be friendly—we must be, if only for the sake of the memory of Chris. You and I are frank to-day. But you saw long ago what I tried to hide, so it is no news to you. You will understand. When Hicks died I thought perhaps after years—but that's over now. She's gone.'

'Didn't you know? She's back again.'

'Back? Good God!'

John laughed at his brother's profound agitation.

'Like as not you'd see her if you went over Rushford Bridge. She's back with her mother. Queer

devils all of them; but I suppose you can have her for the asking now if you couldn't before. Damnably like her brother she is. She passed me two days ago, and looked at me as if I was transparent, or a mere shadow hiding something else.'

A rush of feeling overwhelmed Martin before this tremendous news. He could not trust himself to speak. Then a great hope wrestled with him and conquered. In his own exaltation he desired to see all whom he loved equally lifted up towards happiness.

'I wish to heaven you would open your eyes and raise them from your dogs and find a wife, John.'

'Ah! We all want the world to be a pretty fairy tale for our friends. You scent your own luck ahead, and wish me to be lucky too. I ought to thank you for that; but, instead, I'll give you some advice. Don't bother yourself with the welfare of others; to do that is to ruin your own peace of mind and court more trouble than your share. Every big-hearted man is infernally miserable—he can't help it. The only philosopher's stone is a stone heart; that is what the world's taught me.'

'Never! You're echoing somebody else, not yourself, I'll swear. I know you better. We must see much of one another in the future. I shall buy a little trap that I may drive often to the Red House. And I should like to dedicate my book to you, if you would take it as a compliment.'

'No, no; give it to somebody who may be able to serve you. I'm a fool in such things and know no more about the old stones than the foxes and rabbits that burrow among them. Come, I must get home. I'm glad you have returned, though I hated you when you supported them against me; but then love of family's a mere ghost against love of women. Besides,

how seldom is it that a man's best friend is one of his own blood.'

They rose and departed. John trotted away through Sandypark, having first made Martin promise to sup with him that night, and the pedestrian proceeded by the nearest road to Rushford Bridge.

Chris, he did not see, but it happened that Mr. Lyddon met him just outside Monks Barton, and though Martin desired no such thing at the time, nothing would please the Miller but that his friend should return to the farm for some conversation.

'Home again, an' come to glasses tu! Well, they clear the sight an' we must all wear 'em sooner or late. 'Tis a longful time since I've seed 'e to be sure.'

'All well, I hope?'

'Nothing to grumble at. Billy an' me go down the hill as gradual an' easy as any man's a right to expect. But he's gettin' so bald as a coot; an' now the shape of his head comes to be knawed, theer's wonnerful bumps 'pon it. Then your brother's all for sport an' war. A Justice of the Peace they've made un tu. He's got his volunteer chaps to a smart pitch theer's no gainsaying. A gert man for wild diversions he is. Gwaine coursins wi' long-dogs come winter they tell me.'

'And how are Phoebe and her husband?'

'A little under the weather just now; but I'm watchin' 'em unbeknownst. Theer's a glimmer of hope in the dark if you'll believe it, for Will ackshally comed to me essternight to ax my advice—*my* advice—on a matter of stock! What do 'e think of that?'

'He was fighting a losing battle in a manly sort of way it seemed to me when last I saw him.'

'So he was, and is. I give him eighteen month or thereabout—then 'll come the end of it.'

'The "end"! What end? You won't let them starve? Your daughter and the little children?'

‘You mind your awn business, Martin,’ said Mr. Lyddon, with nods and winks. ‘No, they ban’t gwaine to starve, but my readin’ of Will’s carater has got to be worked out. Tribulation’s what he needs to sweeten him, same as winter sweetens sloes; an’ ’tis tribulation I mean him to have. If Phœbe’s self caan’t change me or hurry me ’tis odds you won’t. Theer’s a darter for ’e! My Phœbe. She’ll often put in a whole week along o’ me still. You mind this: if it’s grawn true an’ thrawn true from the plantin’, a darter’s love for a faither last longer’n any mortal love at all, as I can hear tell of. It don’t wear out wi’ marriage neither, as I’ve found, thank God. Phœbe rises above auld age and the ugliness an’ weakness an’ bad temper of auld age. Even a poor, doddering ancient such as I shall be in a few years won’t weary her; she’ll look back’ards with butivul clear eyes, an’ won’t forget. She’ll see—not awnly a cracked, shrivelled auld man grizzling an’ grumbling in the chimbley corner, but what the man was wance—a faither, strong an’ lusty, as dandled her, an’ worked for, an’ loved her with all his heart in the days of his bygone manhood. Ess, my Phœbe’s all that; an’ she comes here wi’ the child; an’ it pleases me, for, rightly onderstood, childern be a gert keeper-off of age.’

‘I’m sure she’s a good daughter to you, Miller. And Will?’

‘Doan’t you fret. We’ve worked it out in our minds—me an’ Billy; an’ if two auld blids like us can’t hatch a bit o’ wisdom, what brains is worth anything? We’m gwaine to purify the awdacious young chap “so as by fire,” in holy phrase.’

‘You’re dealing with a curious temperament.’

‘I’m dealing with a damned fule,’ said Mr. Lyddon frankly; ‘but theer’s fules an’ fules, an’ this partickler wan’s grawed dear to me in some ways despite myself.’

'Tis Phœbe's done it at bottom I s'pose. The man's so full o' life an' hope. Enough energy in un for ten men; an' enough folly for twenty. Yet he've a gude heart, an' never lied in's life to my knawledge.'

'That's to give him praise, and high praise. How's his sister? I hear she returned after all.'

'Ess—naughty twoad of a gal—runned arter the gipsies! But she'm sobered now. Funny to think her mother, as seemed like a woman robbed of her right hand when Chris went, an' beganned to graw into the sere onusual quick for a widow, took new life as soon as her gal comed back. Just shaws what strength lies in a darter, as I tell 'e.'

The old man's garrulity gained upon him, and though Martin much desired to be gone, he had not the heart to hasten.

'A darter's the thing an'—but 'tis a secret yet—awnly you'll see what you'll see. Coourse Billy's very well for gathered wisdom and high conversation 'bout the world to come; but he ban't like a woman round the house, an' for all his ripe larnin' he'll strike fire sometimes—mostly when I gives him a bad beating at "Oaks" of a evenin'. Then he'm so acid as auld rhubarb, an' dots off to his bed wi'out a "gude-night."''

For another ten minutes Mr. Lyddon chattered, but at the end of that time Martin escaped and proceeded homewards. His head throbbed and his mind was much excited by the intelligence of the day. The yellow stubbles, the green meadows, the ploughed lands similarly spun before him and whirled up to meet the sky. As he re-entered the village a butcher's cart nearly knocked him down. Hope rose in a glorious new sunrise—the hope that he had believed was set for ever. Then passing that former home of Clement Hicks and his mother, did Grimal feel great fear and misgiving. The recollection

of Chris, her love for the dead man, chilled him. He remembered his own love for Chris when he thought she must be dead. He told himself that he must hope nothing; he repeated to himself how fulfilment of his desire, now revived after long sleep, might still be as remote as when Chris Blanchard said him nay in the spring wastes under Newtake five years and more ago. His head dinned this upon his heart; but his heart would not believe and responded with a sanguine song of great promise.

CHAPTER III

ANSWERED

AT a spot in the woods some distance before Newtake, Martin Grimbald sat and waited, knowing she whom he sought must pass that way. He had called at the farm and been welcomed by Phoebe. Will was on the peat beds, and, asking after Chris, he learned that she had gone into the valley to pick blackberries and dewberries, where they already began to ripen in the coombs.

Under aisles of woodland shadows he sat, where the river murmured down mossy stairs of granite in a deep dingle. Above him, the varying foliage of oak and ash and silver birch was already touched with autumn, and trembled into golden points where bosses of pristine granite, crowned with the rowan's scarlet harvest, arose above their luxuriance. The mellow splendour of these forests extended to the river's brink, along which towered masses of giant osmunda, capped by seed spears of tawny red. Here and there gilded lances splashed into the stream or dotted its still pools with

scattered sequins of sunshine, where light winnowed through the dome of the leaves ; and at one spot, on a wrinkled root, that wound crookedly from an alder into the river, there glimmered a halcyon, like an opal on a miser's bony finger. From above the tree-tops sounded cynic bird laughter, and gazing upwards Martin saw a magpie flaunt his black and white plumage across the valley ; while at hand the more musical merriment of a woodpecker answered him.

Then a little child's laugh came to his ear, rippling along with the note of the babbling water, and one moment later a small, sturdy boy appeared. A woman accompanied him. She had slipped a foot into the river, and thus awakened the amusement of her companion.

Chris steadied herself after the mishap, balanced her basket more carefully, then stooped down to pick some of the berries that had scattered from it on the bank. When she rose, a man with a brown face and soft grey eyes gleaming through gold-rimmed spectacles, appeared immediately before.

'Thank God I see you alive again ! Thank God !' he said with intense feeling, as he took her hand and shook it warmly. 'The best news—the best news that ever made my heart glad, Chris.'

She welcomed him, and he, looking into her eyes, saw new knowledge there, a shadow of sobriety, less of the old dance and sparkle. But he remembered the little tremulous up-drawing of her lip when a smile was born, and her voice rang fuller and sweeter than any music he had ever heard since last she spoke to him. A smile of welcome she gave him indeed, and a pressure of his hand that sent magic messages with it to the very core of him. He felt his blood leap, and over his glasses came a dimness.

'I was gwaine to write first moment I heard 'e was

home. An' I wish I had, for I caan't tell 'e what I feel. To think of 'e searchin' the wide world for such a good-for-nought! I thank you for your generous gude-ness, Martin. I'll never forget it—never. But I wasn't worth no such care.'

'Not worth it! It proved the greatest, bitterest grief of all my life—but one—that I couldn't find you. We grew by cruel stages to think—to think you were dead. The agony of that for us! But, thank God, it was not so. All at least is well with you now?'

'All ban't never well with men an' women. But I'm more fortunate than I deserve to be, and can make myself of use. I've lived a score of years since we met. An' I've comed back to find 'tis a difficult world for those I love best, unfortunately.'

Thus, in somewhat disjointed fashion, Chris made answer.

'Sit awhile and speak to me,' replied Martin. 'The laddie can play about. Look at him marching along with that great branch of king fern over his shoulder!'

'Tis an elfin cheel some ways. Wonnerful eyes he've got. They burn me if I look at 'em close,' said Chris. She regarded Timothy without sentiment and her eyes were bright and hard.

'I hope he will turn out well. Will spoke of him the other day. He is very fond of the child. It is singularly like him too—a sort of little pocket edition of him.'

'So I've heard others say. Caan't see it at all myself. Look at the eyes of un.'

'Will believes the boy has got very unusual intelligence and may go far.'

'May go so far as the workhouse,' she answered, with a laugh. Then, observing that her reply pained Martin, Chris snatched up small Tim as he passed by and pressed him to her breast and kissed him.

'You like him better than you think, Chris—poor little motherless thing.'

'Perhaps I do. I wonder if his mother ever looks hungry towards Newtake, when she passes by?'

'Perhaps others took him and told the mother that he was dead.'

'She's dead herself more like. Else the thing wouldn't have falled out.'

There was a pause, then Martin talked of various matters. But he could not fight for long against the desire of his heart and presently plunged, as he had done five years before, into a proposal.

'He being gone—poor Clem—do you think——? Have you thought, I mean? Has it made a difference, Chris? 'Tis so hard to put it into words without sounding brutal and callous. Only men are selfish when they love.'

'What do you mean?' she asked.

A sudden inspiration prompted his reply. He said nothing for a moment, but, with a hand that shook somewhat, drew forth his pocket-book, opened it, fumbled within and then handed over to Chris the brown ruins of flowers long dead.

'You picked them,' he said slowly; 'you picked them long ago and flung them away from you when you said "No" to me—said it so kindly in the past. Take them in your hand again.'

'Dead bluebells,' she answered. 'Ess, I can call home the time. To think you gathered them up!' She looked at him with something not unlike love in her eyes and fingered the flowers gently. 'You'm a gude man, Martin—the husband for a gude lass. Best to find wan if you can. Wish I could help 'e.'

'Oh, Chris, there's only one woman in the world for me. Could you—even now? Could you let me stand between you and the world? Could you, Chris? If

you only knew what I cannot put into words. I'd try so hard to make you happy.'

'I knaw, I knaw. But theer's no human life so long as the road to happiness, Martin. And yet——'

He took her hand and for a moment she did not resist him. Then little Tim's voice chimed out merrily at the stream margin, and the music had instant effect upon Chris Blanchard.

She withdrew her hand from Martin and the next moment he saw his dead bluebells hurrying away and parting company for ever on the dancing water. Chris watched them until they vanished; then she turned and looked at him, to find that he grew very pale and agitated. Even his humility had hardly foreseen this decisive answer after the yielding attitude Chris first assumed when she suffered him to hold her hand. He looked into her face inquiring and frightened. The silence that followed was broken by continued laughter and shouting from Timothy. Then Martin tried to connect the child's first merriment with the simultaneous change in the mood of the woman he worshipped, but failed to do so.

At that moment Chris spoke. She made utterance under the weight of a great emotion and with evident desire to escape the necessity of a direct negative, while yet leaving her refusal of Martin's offer implicit and distinct.

'I mind when a scatter of paper twinkled down this river just like them dead blossoms. Clem thraved them, an' they floated away to the sea, past daffadown-dillies an' budding lady ferns an' such like. 'Twas a li'l bit of poetry he'd made up to please me—and I, fule as I was, didn't say the right thing when he axed me what I thought; so Clem tore the rhymes in pieces an' sent them away. He said the river would onderstand. An' the river onderstands why I dropped them

dead blossoms in tu. A wise, ancient stream I doubt. An' you'm wise tu; an' can take my answer wi'out any more words, as will awnly make both our hearts ache.'

'Not even if I wait patiently? You couldn't marry me, dear Chris? You couldn't get to love me?'

'I couldn't marry you. I'm a widow in heart for all time. But I thank God for the gude-will of such a man as you. I cherish it and 'twill be dear to me all my life. But I caan't come to 'e, so doan't ax it.'

'Yet you're young to live for a memory, Chris.'

'Better'n nothing. And listen; I'll tell you this, if 'twill make my "No" sound less hard to your ear. I loves you—I loves you better'n any living man 'cept Will, an' not less than I love even him. I wish I could bring 'e a spark of joy by marryin' you, for you was allus very gude an' thought kindly of Clem, when but few did. I'd marry you if 'twas awnly for that; yet it caan't never be, along o' many reasons. You must take that cold comfort, Martin.'

He sighed, then spoke.

'So be it, dear one. I shall never ask again. God knows what holds you back if you can even love me a little.'

'Ess, God knaws—everything.'

'I must not cry out against that. Yet it makes it all the harder. To think that you will dedicate all your beautiful life to a memory: it only makes my loss the greater, and shows the depths of you to me.'

She uttered a little scream and put up her hands with the palms outward as though warding away his words.

'Doan't 'e say things like that, for God's sake. I caan't bear it. I be flesh an' blood, no more. If you could only see down in my heart, you'd be cured of your silly love for all time.'

He did not answer, but picked up her basket and

proceeded with her out of the valley. Chris gave a hand to the child, and save for Tim's prattle, there was no speaking.

At length they reached Newtake, when Martin yielded up the basket and bid Chris 'good-night.' He had already turned, when she called him back in a strange voice.

'Kiss the li'l bwoy, will 'e? I want 'e to. I'm that fond of un. An' he 'peared to take to 'e; an' he said "bye-bye" twice to 'e, but you didn't hear un.'

Then the man kissed Tim on a small, purple-stained mouth, and saw his eyes very lustrous with sleep, for the day was done.

Woman and child disappeared; the sacking nailed along the bottom of Newtake gate to keep the young chicks in the farmyard rustled over the ground, and Martin, turning his face away, moved homewards.

But the veil was not lifted for him; he did not understand. A secret, transparent enough to any who regarded Chris Blanchard and her circumstances from a point without the theatre of action, still remained concealed from all who loved her.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF THE FIGHT

WILL BLANCHARD was of the sort who fight a losing battle,

'Still puffing in the dark at one poor coal,
Held on by hope till the last spark is out.'

But the extinction of his ambitions, the final failure of his enterprise happened somewhat sooner than Miller Lyddon had predicted. There dawned a year when,

just as the worst of the winter was past and hope began to revive for another season, a crushing catastrophe terminated the struggle.

Mr. Blee it was who brought the ill news to Monks Barton, having first dropped it at Mrs. Blanchard's cottage and announced it promiscuously about the village. Like a dog with a bone he licked the intelligence over and by his delay in imparting the same reduced his master to a very fever of irritation.

'Such a gashly thing! Of all fules! The last straw I do think. He's got something to grumble at now, poor twoad. Your son-in-law; but now—theer—gormed if I knaw how to tell 'e!'

Alarmed at this prelude, with its dark hints of unutterable woe, Mr. Lyddon took off his spectacles in some agitation, and prayed to know the worst without any long-drawn introduction.

'I'll come to it fast enough, I warn 'e. To think after years an' years he didn't knaw the duffer'nce 'twixt a bullock an' a sheep! Well—well! Of coourse us knawed times was tight, but Jack o' Lantern be to the end of his dance now. 'Tis all awver.'

'What's the matter? Come to it, caan't 'e?'

'No ill of the body—not to him or the fam'ly. An' you must let me tell it out my awn way. Well, things bein' same as they are, the bwoy caan't hide it. Dammy! Theer's patches in the coat of un now—neat sewed, I'll grant 'e, but a patch is a patch; an' when half a horse's harness is odds an' ends o' rope, then you knaw wi'out tellin' wheer a man be driving to. 'Tis 'cordin' to the poetry:—

“Out to elbows,
Out to toes,
Out o' money,
Out o' clothes.”

But——'

'Caan't 'e say what's happened, you chitterin' auld magpie? I'll go up village for the news in a minute. I lay 'tis knawn theer.'

'Ban't I tellin' of 'e? 'Tis like this. Will Blanchard's been mixin' a bit of chopped fuzz with the sheeps' meal these hard times, like his betters. But now I've seed hisself to-day, lookin' so auld as Cosdon 'bout it. He was gwaine to the horse doctor to Moreton. An' he tawld me to keep my mouth shut, which I've done for the most paart.'

'A little fuzz chopped fine doan't hurt sheep.'

'Just so. 'Cause why? They ain't got no "bibles" in theer innards; but he've gone an' given it same way to the bullocks.'

'Gude God!'

'Tis death to beasts wi' "bibles." An' death it is. The things caan't eat such stuff 'cause it sticketh an' brings inflammation. I seed same fule's trick done wance thirty year ago; an' when the animals weer cut awpen, theer "bibles" was hell-hot wi' the awfulest inflammation ever you heard tell of.'

'How many's down? 'Twas all he had to count upon.'

'Awnly eight standin' when he left. I could have cried 'bout it when he tawld me. He'm clay in the Potter's hand for sartain. Theer's nought squenches a chap like havin' the bailiffs in.'

'Cruel luck! I'd meant to let him be sold out for his gude—but now——'

'Do what you meant to. Doan't go back on it. 'Tis for his gude. 'Twas his awn mistake. He tawld me the blame was his. Let un get on the bed rock. Then he'll be meek as a worm.'

'I doubt it. A sale of his goods will break his heart.'

'Not it! He haven't got much as'll be hard to

paart from. Stern measures—stern measures for his everlastin' welfare. Think of the wild-fire sawl of un! Never yet did a sawl want steadin' worse'n his. Keep you to the fust plan, and he'll thank 'e yet.'

Elsewhere two women—his wife and sister—failed utterly in well-meaning efforts to comfort the stricken farmer. Presently, before nightfall, Mrs. Blanchard also arrived at Newtake, and Will listened dully with smouldering eyes as his mother talked. The veterinary surgeon from Moreton had come, but his efforts were vain. Only two beasts out of five-and-twenty still lived.

'Send for butcher,' he said. 'He'll be more use than I can be. The thing is done and can't be undone.'

Chris entered most closely into her brother's feelings and spared him the expressions of sorrow and sympathy which stung him even from his mother's lips uttered at this crisis. She set about preparing supper, which weeping Phœbe had forgotten.

'You'll weather it yet, bwoy,' Mrs. Blanchard said. 'Theer's a little bit as I've got stowed away for 'e; an' come the hay——'

'Doan't talk that way. 'Tis done with now. I'm quite cool 'pon it. We must go as we'm driven. No more gropin' an' fightin' on this blasted wilderness for me, that's all. I be gwaine to turn my back 'pon it—fog an' filthy weather an' ice an' snow. You wants angels from heaven to help 'e, if you're to do any gude here; an' heaven's long tired o' me an' mine. So I'll make shift to do wi'out. An' never tell me no more lies 'bout God helpin' them as helps themselves, 'cause I've proved it ban't so. I be gwaine to furrin lands to dig for gawld or di'monds. The right build

o' man for gawld-seekin', me; 'cause I've larned patience an' caan't be choked off a job tu easy.'

'Think twice. Bad luck doan't dog a man for ever. An' Phoebe an' the childer.'

'My mind's made up. I figured it out comin' home from Moreton. I'm away in six weeks or less. A chap what's got to dig for a livin' may just as well handle his tools wheer theer's summat worth findin' hid in the land, as here, on this black, damned airth, wheer your pick strikes fire out o' stone twenty times a day. The Moor's the Moor. Everybody knaws the way of it. Scratch its faace an' it picks your pocket an' breaks your heart—not as I've got a heart can be broken.'

'If 'e could awnly put more trust in the God of your faithers, my son. He done for them, why shouldn't He do for you?'

'Better ax Him. Tired of the fam'ly, I reckon.'

'You hurt your mother, Will, tellin' so wicked as that.'

'An' faither so cruel,' sobbed Phoebe. 'I doan't know what ever us have done to set him an' God against us so. I've tried that hard; an' you've toiled till the muscles shawed through your skin; an' the li'l bwoy took just as he begannd to string words that butivul; an' no sign of another though 'tis my endless prayer.'

'The ways of Providence——' began Mrs. Blanchard drearily; but Will stopped her, as she knew he would.

'Doan't, mother—I caan't stand no more on that head to-day. I'll dare anybody to name Providence more in my house, so long as 'tis mine. Theer's the facts to shout out 'gainst that rot. A honest, just, plain-dealin' man—an' look at me.'

'Meantime we're ruined an' faither doan't hold out a finger.'

'Take it stern an' hard like me. 'Tis all chance drawin' of prize or blank in gawld diggin'. The "new chums," as they call 'em, often finds the best gawld, 'cause they doan't know wheer to look for it, an' goes pokin' about wheer a skilled man wouldn't. That's the crooked way things happen in this poor world.'

'You wouldn't go—not while I lived sure? I couldn't draw breath comfortable wi'out knowin' you was breathin' the same air, my son.'

'You'll live to know I was in the right. If fortune doan't come to you, you must go to it, I reckon. Anyways I ban't gwaine to bide here a laughing-stock to Chagford; an' you'm the last to ax me to.'

'Miller would never let Phœbe go.'

'I shouldn't say "by your leave" to him, I promise 'e. He can look on an' see the coat rottin' off my back in this desert an' watch his darter gwaine thin as a lath along o' taking so much thought. He can look on at us, hisself so comfortable as a maggot in a pear, an' see—— Not that I'd take help—not a penny from any man. I'm not gwaine to fail. I'll be a snug chap yet.'

The stolid Chown entered at this moment.

'Butcher'll be up bimebye. An' the last of 'em's falled down,' he said.

'So be it. Now us'll taake our supper,' answered his master.

The meal was ready, and presently Blanchard, whose present bitter humour prompted him to simulate a large indifference, made show of enjoying his food. He brought out the brandy for his mother, who drank a little with her supper, and helped himself liberally twice or thrice until the bottle was half emptied. The glamour of the spirit made him optimistic, and he spoke with the pseudo-philosophy that alcohol begets.

'Might have been worse, come to think of it. If the things weern't choked, I doubt they'd been near starved. 'Most all the hay's done, an' half what's left—a load or so—I'd promised to a chap out Manaton way. But theer 'tis—my hand be forced, that's all. So time's saved if you look at it from a right point.'

'You'm hard an' braave, an' you've got a way with you 'mong men. Faace life, same as faither did, an' us'll look arter Phoebe an' the childer,' said Chris.

'I couldn't leave un,' declared Will's wife. ''Tis my duty to keep along wi' un for better or worse.'

'Us'll talk 'bout all that later. I be gwaine to act prompt an' sell every stick, an' then away, a free man.'

'All our furniture an' property!' moaned Phoebe, looking round her in dismay.

'All—to the leastest bit o' cracked cloam.'

'A forced sale brings nought,' sighed Damaris.

'Theer's hunderds o' pounds o' gude chattels here, an' they doan't go for a penny less than they'm worth. Because I'm down, ban't no reason for others to try to rob me. If I doan't get fair money I'll make a fire wi' the stuff an' burn every stick of it.'

The valuer man, Mr. Bambridge, must be seen, an' bills printed out an' sticked 'pon barn doors an' such like, same as when Mrs. Lezzard died,' said Phoebe. 'What'll faither think then?'

Will laughed bitterly.

'I'll see a few's dabbed up on his awn damned outer walls, if I've got to put 'em theer myself. An' as to the lists, I'll make 'em this very night. Ban't my way to let the dust fall upon a job marked for doin'. To-night I'll draw the items.'

'Us was gwaine to stay along with 'e, Will,' said his mother.

'Very gude—as you please. Make shake-downs in

the parlour, an' I'll write in the kitchen when you'm gone to bed. Set the ink an' pen an' paper out arter you've cleared away. I'm allowed to be peart enough in matters o' business anyway, though no farmer o' course arter this.'

'None will dare to say any such thing,' declared Phœbe. 'You can't do miracles more than others.'

'I mind when Ellis, to Two Streams Farm, lost a mort o' bullocks very same way,' said Mrs. Blanchard.

'Tis that as they'll bring against me an' say, wi' such a tale in my knowledge, I ought to been wiser. But I never heard tell of it before, though God knows I've heard the story often enough to-day.'

It was now dark, and Will, lighting a lantern, rose and went out into the yard. From the kitchen window his women watched him moving here and there; while as he passed the light revealed great motionless, rufous shapes on every hand. The corpses of the beasts hove up into the illumination and then vanished again as the narrow circle of lantern light bobbed on, jerking to the beat of Will's footsteps. From the window Damaris observed her son make a complete perambulation of his trouble without comment. Then a little emotion trembled on her tongue.

'God's hand be lifted 'gainst the bwoy, same as 'twas 'gainst the patriarch Job seemin'ly. Awnly he bent to the rod and Will——'

'He'm noble an' grand under his sorrows. Who should knaw but me?' cried Phœbe. 'A man in ten thousand, he is, an' never yields to no rod. He'll win his way yet; an' I be gwaine to cleave to un if he travels to the other end o' the airth.'

'I doan't judge un, gal. God knaws he's been the world to me since his faither died. He'm my dear son. But if he'd awnly bend afore the A'mighty breaks him.'

'He's got me.'

'Ess, an' he'm mouldin' you to his awn vain pride an' wrong ways o' thinking. If you could lead un right, 'twould be a better wife's paart.'

'He'm wiser'n me, an' stronger. Ban't my place to think against him. Us'll go our ways, childern tu, an' turn our backs 'pon this desert. I hate the plaace now, same as Will.'

Chris here interrupted Phoebe and called her from the other room.

'Wheer's the paper an' ink to? I be setting out the things against Will comes in. He axed for 'em to be ready, 'cause theer's a deal o' penmanship afore him to-night. An' wheer's that li'l dictionary what I gived un years ago? I lay he'll want it.'

CHAPTER V

TWO MIGHTY SURPRISES

WILL returned from survey of his tribulation. Hope was dead for the moment and death of hope in a man of Blanchard's character proved painful. The writing materials distracted his mind. Beginning without interest, his composition speedily absorbed him; and before the task was half completed, he already pictured it set out in great black or red print upon conspicuous places.

'I reckon it'll make some of 'em stare to see the scholar I am anyways,' he reflected.

Through the hours of night he wrote and re-wrote. His pen scratched along, echoed by an exactly similar sound from the wainscots, where mice nibbled in the silence. Anon, from the *débris* of his composition,

a complete work took shape; and when Phœbe awoke at three o'clock, discovered her husband was still absent and sought him hurriedly, she found the inventory completed and Will just fastening its pages together with a piece of string. He was wide awake and in a particularly happy humour.

'Ban't you never comin' to bed? 'Tis most marnin',' she said.

'Just comin'. What a job! Look here—twelve pages. I be surprised myself to think how blamed well I've got through wi' it. You doan't knaw what you can do till you try. I used to wonder at Clem's cleverness wi' a pen; but I be purty near so handy myself an' never guessed it!'

'I'm sure you've made a braave job of it. I'll read it fust thing to-morrow.'

'You shall hear it now.'

'Not now, Will; 'tis so late an' I'm three paarts asleep. Come to bed, dearie.'

'Oh—if you doan't care—if it's nought to you that I've sit up all night slavin' for our gude——'

'Then I'll hear it now. Coourse I knaw 'tis fine readin'. Awnly I thought you'd be weary.'

'Sit here an' put your toes to the heat.'

He set Phœbe in the chimney corner, wrapped his coat round her, and threw more turf on the fire.

'Now you'm vitty; an' if theer's anything left out, tell me.'

'I lay, wi' your memory, you've forgot little enough.'

'I lay I haven't. All's here; an' 'tis a gert wonder what a lot o' gude things us have got. They did ought to fetch a couple o' hunderd pound at least, if the sale's carried out proper.'

'They didn't cost so much as that.'

'By Gor! Didn't they? Well, set out in full, like this here, they do sound as if they ought to be worth

it. Now I'll read 'em to see how it all sounds in spoken words.'

He cleared his throat and began:

"Sale this day to Newtake Farm, near Chagford, Dartmoor, Devonshire. Mr. William Blanchard, being about to leave England for foreign parts, desires to sell at auction his farm property, household goods, cloam and effects, etc., etc., as per items below, to the best bidder. Many things so good as new." How do 'e like that, Phoebe?'

'Butivul; but do 'e mean in all solemn seriousness to go out England? 'Tis a awful thought come you look at it close.'

'Ess, 'tis a gert, bold thing to do; but I doan't fear it. I be gettin' into a businesslike way o' lookin' 'pon life of late; an' I counts the cost an' moves arter, as is the right order. Listen to these items set out here. If they'm printed big wan under t' other same as I've wrote 'em, they'll fill a barn door purty nigh!'

Then he turned to his papers.

"The said goods and chattels are as follows, namely——" Reg'lar lawyer's English, you see, though how I comed to get it so pat I caan't tell. Yet theer 'tis. "Namely, 2 washing trays; 3 zinc buckets; 1 meat preserve; 1 lantern; 2 bird-cages; carving knife and steel (Sheffield make)——"

'Do 'e judge that's the best order, Will?'

'Coourse 'tis! I thought that out specially. Doan't go thrawin' me from my stride in the middle. Arter "Sheffield make," "Half-dozen knives and forks; sundry ditto, not so good; hand saw; 2 hammers; 1 cleaver; salting trendle; 3 wheel-barrows——"

'Doan't forget you lent wan of 'em to Farmer Thackwell.'

'No, I gived it to un, him bein' pushed for need of wan. It slipped my memory. "2 wheel-barrows."

Then I goes on: "Pig stock; pig-trough; 2 young breeding sows; 4 garden tools; 2 peat cutters; 2 carts; 1 market trap; 1 empty cask; 1 dutch oven; 1 funnel; 2 firkins and a cider jib; small sieve; 3 pairs new Bedford harrows; 1 chain harrow (out of repair)." You see all's straight enough, which it ban't in some sales. No man shall say he's got less than full value.'

'You'm the last to think of such a thing.'

'I am. It goes on like this: "5 mattocks; 4 digging picks; 4 head chains; 1 axe; sledge and wedges; also hooks, eyes, and hasps for hard wood." Never used 'em all the time us been here. "2 sets of trap harness, much worn." I ban't gwaine to sell the dogs—eh? Us won't sell Ship or your li'l terrier. What do 'e say?'

'No. Nobody would buy two auld dogs for that matter.'

'Though how a upland dog like Ship be gwaine to faace the fiery sunshine on furrin' gawld diggings, I caan't answer. Here goes again: "1 sofa; 1 arm-chair; 4 fine chairs, with green cloth seats; 1 bedstead; 2 cots; 1 cradle; feather-beds and palliasses and bolster pillows to match; wash-stands and sets of crockery, mostly complete; 2 swing glasses; 3 bedroom chairs; 1 set of breeching harness——"

'Hadn't 'e better put that away from the furniture?'

'No gert odds. "Also 1 set leading harness; 2 tressels and ironing board; 2 fenders; fire-irons and fire-dogs; 1 old oak chest; 1 wardrobe; 1 Brussels carpet (worn in one spot only)."

'Ban't worn worth namin'.'

'Ess fay 'tis: wheer I sit Sundays. "9 feet by 11. 3 four-prong dung forks." I'll move them. They doan't come in none tu well theer, I allow. "5 cane-seated chairs. 1 specimen of wax fruit under glass."'

'I caan't paart wi' that, lovey. Faither gived it to me; an' 'twas mother's wance on a time.'

'Well, bein' a forced sale it ought to go. An' seein' how Miller's left us to sail our awn boat to hell—but still, if you 'm set on it.'

He crossed it out, then suddenly laughed until the walls rang.

'Hush! You'll wake everybody. What do 'e find to be happy about?'

'I was thinkin' that down in them furrin, fiery paarts we'm gwaine to, as your wax plums an' pears'll damned soon run away. They'll melt for sartin!'

'Caan't be so hot as that! The li'l gal will never stand it. Read on now. Theer ban't much left surely?'

'Scores o' things! "1 stuffed kingfisher in good case with painted picture at back; 1 fox mask; 1 mahogany 2-lap table; 1 warming pan; Britannia metal teapot and 6 spoons ditto metal; 5 spoons smaller—ditto metal."'

'I found the wan us lost.'

'Then 'tis "6 spoons smaller—ditto metal." Then "Ironing-stove; 5 irons; washing-boiler; 4 fry pans; 2 chimney crooks; 6 saucepans; pestle and mortar; chimney ornaments; 4 coloured almanacs—one with picture of the Queen——"'

'They won't fetch nothin'.'

'They might. "Knife sharper; screen; pot plants; 1 towel rail; 1 runner; 2 forms; kitchen table; scales and weights and beam; 1 set of castors; 4 farm horses, aged; 3 ploughs; 1 hay wain; 1 stack of dry fern; 1½ tons good manure; old iron and other sundries, including poultry, ducks, geese, and fowls." That's all.'

'Not quite; but I caan't call to mind much you've left out 'cept all the china an' linen.'

'Ah! that's your job. An' I just sit here an' brought

the things to my memory, wan by wan! An' that bit at the top came easy as cutting a stick!'

'Tis a wonnerful piece o' work. An' the piano, Will?'

'I hadn't forgot that. Must take it along wi' us, or else send it down to mother. Couldn't look her in the faace if I sold that.'

'Ban't worth much.'

'Caan't say. Cost faither five pound, though that was long ago. Anyway I be gwaine to buy it in.'

Silence then fell upon them. Phœbe sighed and shivered. A cock crew and his note came muffled from the hen-roost. A dim grey dawn just served to indicate the recumbent carcasses without.

'Come to bed now an' take a little rest 'fore marnin', dearie. You've worked hard an' done wonders.'

'Ban't you surprised I could turn it out?'

'That I be. I'd never have thought 'twas in 'e. So forehanded tu! A'most afore them poor things be cold.'

'Tis the fore-handedness I prides myself 'pon. Some of us doan't know all that's in me yet. But they'll live to see it.'

'I knaw right well they will.'

'This'll maze mother to-morrow.'

'Twill sure 'nough.'

'Would 'e like me to read it just wance more wi'out stoppin', Phœbe?'

'No, dear love, not now. Give it to us all arter breakfast in the marnin'.'

'So I will then; an' take it right away to the Auctioneer the minute after.'

He put his papers away in the drawer of the kitchen table and retired. Uneasy sleep presently overtook him and long he tossed and turned, murmuring of his astonishment at his own powers with a pen.

His impetuosity carried the ruined man forward with

sufficient speed over the dark bitterness of failure confessed, failure advertised, failure proclaimed in print throughout the confines of his little world. He suffered much, and the widespread sympathy of friends and acquaintances proved no anodyne but rather the reverse. He hated to see eyes grow grave and mouths serious upon his entry; he yearned to turn his back against Chagford and resume the process of living in a new environment. Temporary troubles vexed him more than the supreme disaster of his failure. Mr. Bambridge made considerable alterations in his cherished lucubration: and when the advertisement appeared in print, it looked mean and filled but a paltry space. People came up before the sale to examine the goods, and Phœbe, after two days of whispered colloquies upon her cherished property, could bear it no longer, and left Newtake with her own small daughter and little Timothy. The Rev. Shorto-Champernowne himself called, stung Will into sheer madness, which he happily restrained, then purchased an old oak coffer for two pounds and ten shillings.

Miller Lyddon made no sign, and hard things were muttered against him and Billy Blee in the village. Virtuous indignation got hold upon the Chagford quidnuncs and with one consent they declared Mr. Lyddon to blame. Where was his Christian charity—that charity which should begin at home and so seldom does? This interest in others' affairs took shape on the night before the Newtake sale. Then certain of the baser sort displayed their anger in a practical form, and Mr. Blee was hustled one dark evening, had his hat knocked off, and suffered from a dead cat thrown by unseen hands. The reason for this outrage also reached him. Then, chattering with indignation and alarm, he hurried home and acquainted Mr. Lyddon with the wild spirit abroad.

As for Blanchard, he roamed moodily about the scene of his lost battle. In his pockets were journals setting forth the innumerable advantages of certain foreign regions that other men desired to people for their private ends. But Will was still undecided, because all the prospects presented appeared to lead directly to fortune.

The day of the sale dawned fine and at the appointed hour a thin stream of market carts and foot passengers wound towards Newtake from the village beneath and from a few outlying farms. Blanchard had gone up the adjacent hill; and lying there not far distant from the granite cross, he reclined with his dog and watched the people. Him they did not see; but them he counted and found some sixty souls had been attracted by his advertisement. Men laughed and joked, and smoked; women shrugged their shoulders, peeped about and disparaged the goods. Here and there a purchaser took up his station beside a coveted lot. Some noticed that none of those most involved were present; others spread a rumour that Miller Lyddon designed to stop the sale at the last moment and buy in everything. But no such incident broke the course of proceedings.

Will, from his hiding-place in the heather, saw Mr. Bambridge drive up, noted the crowd follow him about the farm, like black flies, and felt himself a man at his own funeral. The hour was dark enough. In the ear of his mind he listened to the auctioneer's hammer, like a death bell, beating away all that he possessed. He had worked and slaved through long years for this: for the sympathy of Chagford, for the privilege of spending a thousand pounds, for barely enough money to carry himself abroad. A few more figures dotted the white road and turned into the open gate at Newtake. One shape, though too remote to recognise with cer-

tainty, put him in mind of Martin Grimbald, another might have been Sam Bonus. He mused upon the two men, so dissimilar, and his mind dwelt chiefly with the former. He found himself thinking how good it would be if Martin proposed to Chris again: that the antiquary had done so was the last idea in his thoughts.

Presently a brown figure crept through Newtake gate, hesitated awhile, then began to climb the hill and approach Blanchard. Ship recognised it before Will's eyes enabled him to do so, and the dog rose from a long rest, stretched, sniffed the air, then trotted off to the approaching new-comer.

It was Ted Chown; and in five minutes he reached his master with a letter. "'Tis from Miller Lyddon," he said. "It comed by the auctioneer. I thought you was up here."

Blanchard took it without thanks, waited until the labourer had departed, then opened the letter with some slight curiosity.

He read a page of scriptural quotations and admonitions, then tore the communication in half with a curse and flung it from him. But presently his anger waned; he rose, picked up his father-in-law's note, and plodded through it to the end.

His first emotion was one of profound thanksgiving that he had done so. Here, at the very end of the letter, was the practical significance of it.

"Powder fust, jam arter, by God!" cried Will aloud. Then a burst of riotous delight overwhelmed him. Once again in his darkest hour had Fortune turned the wheel. He shouted, put the letter into his breast pocket, rose up and straightway strode off to Chagford as fast as his legs would carry him. He thought what his mother and wife would feel upon such news. Then he swore heartily—swore down blessings innumerable

on Miller Lyddon, whistled to his dog and so journeyed on.

The master of Monks Barton had reproved Will through long pages, cited Scripture at him, displayed his errors in a grim procession, then praised him for his prompt and manly conduct under the present catastrophe, declared that his character had much developed of recent years, and concluded by offering him five-and-thirty shillings a week at Monks Barton, with the only stipulation that himself, his wife and the children should dwell at the farm.

Praise, of which he had received little enough for many years, was pure honey to Will. From the extremity of gloom and from a dark and settled enmity towards Mr. Lyddon, he passed quicker than thought to an opposite condition of mind.

'Tis a fairy story—awnly true!' he said to himself as he swept along.

Will came near choking when he thought of the Miller. Here was a man that believed in him! Newtake tumbled clean out of his mind before this revelation of Mr. Lyddon's trust and confidence. He was full to the brain-pan with Monks Barton. The name rang in his ears. Before he reached Chagford he had planned innumerable schemes for developing the valley farm, for improving, saving, increasing possibilities in a hundred directions. He pictured himself putting money into the Miller's pocket. He determined to bring that about if he had to work four-and-twenty hours a day to do it. He almost wished some profound peril would threaten his father-in-law, that he, at the cost of half his life, if need be, might rescue him and so repay a little of this great debt. Ship, taking the cue from his master, as a dog will, leaped and barked before him. In the valley below Phoebe wept on Mrs. Blanchard's bosom, and Chris said hard things of those in authority

at Monks Barton ; up aloft at Newtake, shillings rather than pounds changed hands, and many a poor lot found no purchaser.

Passing by a gate beneath the great hill of Middle-down, Will saw two sportsmen with a keeper and a brace of terriers emerge from the wild land above. They were come from rabbit shooting, as the attendant's heavy bag testified. They faced him as he passed and, recognising John Grimbal, Will did not look at his companion. At rest with the world just then, happy and contented to a degree he had not reached for years, the young farmer was in such amiable mood that he had given the devil 'good-day' on slightest provocation. Now he was carried out of himself, and spoke upon a joyous inclination of the moment.

'Marnin' to 'e, Jan Grimbal ! Glad to hear tell as your greyhound wonned the cup down to Newton coursing.'

The other was surprised into a sort of grunt ; then, as Will moved rapidly out of earshot, Grimbal's companion addressed him. It was Major Tremayne ; and now the soldier regarded Blanchard's vanishing figure with evident amazement, then spoke.

'By Jove ! Tom Newcombe, by all that's wonderful,' he said.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECRET OUT

Now many different persons in various places were simultaneously concerned with Will Blanchard and his affairs.

At Newtake, Martin Grimbal was quietly buying a

few lots—and those worth the most money. He designed these as a gift for Phœbe; and his object was not wholly disinterested. The antiquary could by no means bring himself to accept his last dismissal from Chris. Seeing the vague nature of those terms in which she had couched her refusal, and remembering her frank admission that she could love him, he still hoped. All his soul was wrapped up in the winning of Chris, and her face came between him and the proof sheets of his book; the first thoughts of his wakening mind turned to the same problem; the last reflections of a brain sinking to rest were likewise occupied with it. How could he win her? Sometimes his yearning desires clamoured for any possible road to the precious goal, and he remembered his brother's hint that a secret existed in Will's life. At such times he wished that he knew it, and wondered vaguely if the knowledge was of a nature to further his own ambition. Then he blushed and thought ill of himself. But this personal accusation was unjust, for it is the property of a strong intellect engaged about affairs of supreme importance, to suggest every possible action and present every possible point of view by the mere mechanical processes of thinking. The larger a brain, the more alternative courses are offered, the more facets gleam with thought, the more numerous the roads submitted to judgment. It is a question of intellect, not ethics. Right actions and crooked are alike remorselessly presented, and the Council of Perfection, that to think amiss is sin, must convict every saint of unnumbered offences. As reasonably might we blame him who dreams murder. Departure from rectitude can only begin where evil thought is converted into evil action, for thought alone of all man's possessions and antecedents is free, and a lifetime of self-control and high thinking will not shut the door against ideas. That

Martin—a man of luminous if limited intellect—should have considered every possible line of action, which might assist him to come at the highest good life could offer, was inevitable; but he missed the reason of certain sinister notions and accused himself of baseness in giving birth to them. Nevertheless, the idea recurred and took shape. He associated John's assertion of a secret with another rumour that had spread much further afield. This concerned the parentage of little Timothy the foundling, for it was whispered widely of late that the child belonged to Blanchard. Of course many people knew all the facts, were delighted to retail them, and could give the mother's name. Only those most vitally concerned had heard nothing as yet.

These various matters were weighing not lightly on Martin's mind during the hours of the Newtake sale; and meantime Will thundered into his mother's cottage and roared the news. He would hear of no objection to his wish, that one and all should straightway proceed to Monks Barton, and he poured forth the Miller's praises while Phœbe was reduced to tears by perusal of her father's letter to Will.

'Thank Heaven the mystery's read now an' us can see how Miller had his eyes 'pon 'e both all along an' just waited for the critical stroke,' said Mrs. Blanchard. 'Sure I've knawed him these many years an' never could onderstand his hard way in this; but now all's clear.'

'He might have saved us a world of trouble and a sea o' tears if he'd awnly spoken sooner, whether or no,' murmured Chris, but Will would tolerate no unfriendly criticism.

'He'm a gert man, wi' his awn way o' doin' things, like all gert men,' he burst out; 'an' ban't for any wan to call un in question. He knawed the hard stuff I was made of and let me bide accordin'. An' now get

your bonnets on, the lot of 'e, for I'm gwaine this instant moment to Monks Barton.'

They followed him in a breathless procession, as he hurried across the farmyard.

'Rap to the door quick, dear heart,' said Phœbe, 'or I'll be cryin' again.'

'No more rappin' after thicky butivul letter,' answered Will. 'Us'll gaw straight in.'

'You walk fust, Phœbe—'tis right you should,' declared Mrs. Blanchard. 'Then Will can follow 'e; an' me an' Chris—us'll walk 'bout for a bit, till you beckons from window.'

'Cheer up, Phœbe,' cried Will. 'Trouble's blawed awver for gude an' all now by the look of it. 'Tis plain sailing hencefarrard, thank God, that is if a pair o' strong arms, working morning an' night for Miller, can bring it about.'

So they went together, where Mr. Lyddon waited nervously within; and Damaris and Chris walked beside the river.

Upon his island sat the anchorite Muscovy duck as of yore. He was getting old. He still lived apart and thought deeply about affairs; but his conclusions he never divulged.

Yet another had been surprised into unutterable excitement during that forenoon. John Grimal found the fruit of long desire tumble into his hand at last, as Major Tremayne made his announcement. The officer was spending a fortnight at the Red House, for his previous friendship with John Grimal had ripened.

'By Jove! Tom Newcombe by all that's wonderful!' he exclaimed, as Will swung past him down the hill to happiness.

'That's not his name. It's Blanchard. He's a young fool of a farmer, and Lord knows what he's got

to be so cock-a-hoop about. Up the hill they're selling every stick he's got at auction. He's ruined.'

'He might be ruined indeed if I liked. "Tom Newcombe" he called himself when he was with us.'

'A soldier!'

'He certainly was; and my servant; about the most decent, straightforward, childlike chap that I ever saw.'

'God!'

'You're surprised. But it's a fact. That's Newcombe all right. You couldn't forget a face and a laugh like his. The handsomest man I've ever seen bar none. He borrowed a suit of my clothes, the beggar, when he vanished. But a week later I had the things back with a letter. He trusted me that far. I tried to trace him, of course, but was not sorry I failed.'

'A letter!'

'Yes, giving a reason for his desertion. Some chap was running after his girl and had got her in a corner and bullied her into saying "Yes," though she hated the sight of him. I'd have done anything for Tom. But he took the law into his own hands. He disappeared—we were at Shorncliffe then if I remember rightly. The chap had joined to get abroad, and he told me all his harum-scarum ambitions once. I hope the poor devil was in time to rescue his sweetheart anyway.'

'Yes, he was in time for that.'

'I'm glad.'

'Should you see him again, Tremayne, I would advise your pretending not to know him. Unless, of course, you consider it your duty to proclaim him.'

'Bless your life, I don't know him from Adam,' declared the Major. 'I'm not going to move after all these years, I wish he'd come back to me again all the same. A good servant.'

‘Poor brute! What’s the procedure with a deserter? Do you send soldiers for him or the police?’

‘A pair of handcuffs and the local bobby, that’s all. Then the man’s handed over to the military authorities and court-martialed.’

‘What would he get?’

‘Depends on circumstances and character. Tom might probably have six months, as he didn’t give himself up. I should have thought, knowing the manner of man, that he would have done his business, married the girl, then come back and surrendered. In that case, being peace time, he would only have forfeited his service, which didn’t amount to much.’

So John Grimal learned the secret of his enemy at last, but to pursue a former simile, the fruit had remained so long out of reach that now it was not only over-ripe, but rotten. There began a painful resuscitation of desires towards revenge—desires long moribund. To flog into life a passion near dead of inanition was Grimal’s disgusting task. For days and nights the thing was as Frankenstein’s creation of grisly shreds and patches; then it moved spasmodically; or he fancied that it moved.

He fooled himself with reiterated assurances that he was glorying in the discovery; he told himself that he was not made of the human stuff that can forgive bitter wrongs or forget them until cancelled. He painted in lurid colours his past griefs; through a ghastly morass of revenge grown stale, of memories deadened by time, he tried to struggle back to his original starting-point in vanished years, and feel as he felt when he flung Will Blanchard over Rushford Bridge.

Once he wished to God the truth had never reached him; then he urged himself to use it instantly and plague his mind no more. A mental exhaustion and nausea overtook him. Upon the night of his discovery

he retired to sleep wishing that Blanchard would be as good as his rumoured word and get out of England. But this thought took a shape of reality in the tattered medley of dreams, and Grimbald, waking, leapt on to the floor of his chamber in frantic fear that his enemy had escaped him.

As yet he knew nothing of Will's good fortune, and when it came to his ears it unexpectedly failed to reawaken resentment or strengthen his animosity. For, as he retraced the story of the past years, it was with him as with a man reading the narrative of another's wrongs. He could not yet absorb himself anew in the strife; he could not revive the personal element.

Sometimes he looked at himself in the glass as he shaved; and the sight of the grey hair thickening on the sides of his head, the spectacle of the deep lines upon his forehead and the stamp of many a shadowy crow's foot about his blue eyes—these indications served more than all his thoughts to sting him into deeds and rekindle an active malignancy.

CHAPTER VII

SMALL TIMOTHY

A YEAR and more than a year passed by, during which time some pure sunshine brightened the life of Blanchard. Chagford laughed at his sustained good fortune, declared him to have as many lives as a cat, and secretly regretted its outspoken criticism of Miller Lyddon before the event of his generosity. Life at Monks Barton was at least wholly happy for Will himself. No whisper or rumour of renewed tribulation

reached his ear ; early and late he worked, with wholehearted energy ; he differed from Mr. Blee as seldom as possible ; he wearied the Miller with new designs, tremendous enterprises, particulars concerning novel machinery, and much information relating to nitrates. Newtake had vanished out of his life, like an old coat put off for the last time. He never mentioned the place and there was now but one farm in all Devon for him.

Meantime a strange cloud increased above him, though as yet he had not discerned so much as the shadow of it. This circumstance possessed no connection with John Grimbal. Time passed and still he did not take action, though he continued to nurse his wrongs through winter, spring, and summer, as a child nurses a sick animal. The matter tainted his life but did not dominate it. His existence continued to be soured and discoloured, yet not entirely spoiled. Now a new stone of stumbling lay ahead and Grimbal's interest had shifted a little.

Like the rest of Chagford he heard the rumour of little Timothy's parentage—a rumour that grew as the resemblance ripened between Blanchard and the child. Interested by this thought and its significance, he devoted some time to it ; and then, upon an early October morning, Chance hurried the man into action. On the spur of an opportunity he played the coward, as many another man has done, only to mourn his weakness too late.

There came a misty autumn sunrise beside the river, and Grimbal, hastening through the valley of Teign, suddenly found himself face to face with Phœbe. She had been upon the meadows since grey dawn, where many mushrooms set in silvery dew glimmered like pearls through the mist ; and now, with a full basket, she was returning to Monks Barton for breakfast. As she rested for a moment at a stile between two fields,

Grimbal loomed large from the foggy atmosphere and stood beside her. She moved her basket for him to pass and her pulses quickened but slightly, for she had met him on numerous occasions during past years and they were now as strangers. To Phoebe he had long been nothing, and any slight emotion he might awaken was in the nature of resentment that the man could still harden his heart against her husband and remain thus stubborn and obdurate after such lapse of time. When therefore John Grimbal, moved thereto by some sudden prompting, addressed Will's wife, she started in astonishment and a blush of warm blood leapt to her face. He himself was surprised at his own voice; for it sounded unfamiliar, as though some intelligent thing had suddenly possessed him and was using his vocal organs for its own ends.

'Don't move. Why, 'tis a year since we met alone, I think. So you are back at Monks Barton. Does it bring thoughts? Is it all sweet? By your face I should judge not.'

She stared and her mouth trembled, but she did not answer.

'You needn't tell me you're happy,' he continued, with hurried words. 'Nobody is for that matter. But you might have been. Looking at your ruined life and my own I can find it in my heart to be sorry for us both.'

'Who dares to say my life is ruined?' she flashed out. 'D'you think I would change Will for the noblest in the land? He *is* the noblest. I want no pity—least of all yours. I've been a very lucky woman and—and—everybody knows it whatever they may say here an' theer.'

She was strong before him now; her temper appeared in her voice and she took her basket and rose to leave him.

'Wait one moment. Chance threw us here, and I'll never speak to you again if you resent it. But, meeting you like this, something seemed to tell me to say a word and let you know. I'm sorry you are so wretched—honestly.'

'I ban't wretched! Never was a happier wife.'

'Never was a better one I know; but happy? Think. I was fond of you once, and I can read between the lines—the little thin lines on your forehead. They are new-comers. I'm not deceived. Nor is it hidden. That the man has proved faithless is common knowledge now. Facts are hard things, and you've got the fact under your eyes. The child's his living image.'

'Who told you, and how dare you foul my ears and thoughts with such lies?' she asked, her bosom heaving. 'You'm a coward as you always was, but never more a coward than this minute.'

'D'you pretend that nobody has told you this? Aren't your own eyes bright enough to see it?'

The man was in a pitiful mood, and now he grew hot and forgot himself wholly before her stinging contempt. She did not reply to his question, and he continued—

'Your silence is an answer. You know well enough. Who's the mother? Perhaps you know that too. Is she more to him than you are?'

Phœbe made a great effort to keep herself from screaming. Then she moved hastily away, but Grimbald stopped her and dared her to proceed.

'Wait. I'll have this out. Why don't you face him with it and make him tell you the truth? Any plucky woman would. The scandal grows into a disgrace and your father's a fool to stand it. You can tell him so from me.'

'Mind your awn business an' let me pass, you

hulking, gert, venomous wretch!' she cried. Then a blackguard inspiration came to the man, and suffering under a growing irritation with himself as much as with Phoebe, he conceived an idea by which his secret might after all be made a bitter weapon. He assured himself, even while he hated the sight of her, that justice to Phoebe must be done. She had dwelt in ignorance long enough. He determined to tell her that she was the wife of a deserter. The end gained was the real idea in his mind, though he tried to delude himself. The sudden idea that he might inform Blanchard through Phoebe of his knowledge really actuated him.

'You may turn your head away as if I was dirt, you little fool, and you may call me what names you please; but I'm raising this question for your good, not my own. What do I care? Only it's a man's part to step in when he sees a woman being trampled on.'

'A man!' she said. 'You'm not in our lives any more, an' we doan't want 'e in 'em. More like to a meddlin' auld woman than a man.'

'You can say that? Then we'll put you out of the question. I, at least, shall do my duty.'

'Is it part of your duty to bully me here alone? Why doan't 'e faace the man, like a man, 'stead of blusterin' to me 'bout it? Out on you! Let me pass, I tell 'e.'

'Doan't make that noise. Just listen and stand still. I'm in earnest. It pleases me to know the true history of this child, and I mean to. As a Justice of the Peace I mean to.'

'Ax Will Blanchard then an' let him answer. Maybe you'll be sorry you spoke arter.'

'You can tell him I want to see him; you can say I order him to come to the Red House between eight and nine next Monday.'

'Be you a fule? Who's he to come at your bidding?'

'He's a—well, no matter. You've got enough to trouble you. But I think he will come. Tell him that I know where he was during the autumn and winter of the year that I returned home from Africa. Tell him I know where he came from to marry you. Tell him the grey suit of clothes reached the owner safely—remember, the grey suit of clothes. That will refresh his memory. Then I think he will come fast enough and let me have the truth concerning this brat. If he refuses, I shall take steps to see justice done.'

'I lay he's never put himself in the power of a black-hearted, cruel beast like you,' blazed out the woman, furious and frightened at once.

'Has he not? Ask him. You don't know where he was during those months. I thought you didn't. I do. Perhaps this child—perhaps the other woman's the married one——'

Phœbe dropped her basket and her face grew very pale before the horrors thus coarsely spread before her. She staggered and felt sick at the man's last speech. Then, with one great sob of breath, she turned her back on him, nerved herself to use her shaking legs and set off at her best speed, as one running from some dangerous beast of the field.

Grimbal made no attempt to follow, but watched her fade into the mist, then turned and pursued his way through the dripping woodlands. Sunrise fires gleamed along the upper layers of the fading vapours and gilded autumn's handiwork. Ripe seeds fell tapping through the gold of the horse-chestnuts, and many acorns also pattered down upon a growing carpet of leaves. Webs and gossamers twinkled in the sunlight, and the flaming foliage made a pageant of colour through waning mists where red leaves and

yellow fell at every breath along the thinning woods. Beneath trees and hedgerows the ripe mosses gleamed, and coral and amber fungi, with amanita and other hooded folk. In companies and clusters they sprang, or arose misshapen, sinister, and alone. Some were orange and orange-tawny; others white and purple; not a few peered forth livid, blotched, and speckled, as with venom spattered from some reptile's jaws. On the wreck of the year they flourished, sucked strange life from rotten stick and hollow tree, opened gills on lofty branch and bough, shone in the green grass rings of the meadows, thrust cup and cowl from the concourse of the dead leaves in ditches, clustered like the uprising roof-trees of a fairy village in dingle and in dene.

At the edge of the woods John Grimbald stood, and the hour was very dark for him and he cursed at the loss of his manhood. His heart turned to gall before the thought of the thing done, as he blankly marvelled what base, unsuspected instinct had thus disgraced him. He had plumbed a possibility unknown within his own character, and before his shattered self-respect he stood half passionate, half amazed. Chance had thus wrecked him; an impulse had altered the whole face of the problem; and he grit his teeth as he thought of Blanchard's feelings when Phoebe should tell her story. As for her, she at least had respected him during the past years; but what must henceforth be her estimate of him? He heaped bitter contempt upon himself for this brutality to a woman; he raged, as he pursued long chains of consequences begot of this single lapse of self-control. His eye was cleared from passion; he saw the base nature of his action and judged himself as others would judge him. This spectacle produced a definite mental issue and aroused long stagnant emotions from their troubled slumbers.

He discovered that a frank hatred of Will Blanchard awoke and lived. He told himself this man was to blame for all, and not content with poisoning his life, now ravaged his soul also and blighted every outlook of his being. Like a speck upon an eyeball, which blots the survey of the whole eye, so this wretch had fastened upon him, ruined his ambitions, wrecked his life, and now dragged his honour and his very manhood into the dust. John Grimal found himself near choked by a raging fit of passion at last. He burnt into sheer frenzy against Blanchard; and the fuel of the fire was the consciousness of his own craven performance of that morning. Flying from self-contemplation, he sought distraction and even oblivion at any source where his mind could win it; and now he laid all blame on his enemy and suffered the passion of his own shame and remorse to rise, as it had been a red mist, against this man who was playing havoc with his body and soul. He trembled under the loneliness of the woods in a debauch of mere brute rage that exhausted him and left a mark on the rest of his life. Even his present powers appeared trifling and their exercise a deed unsatisfying before this frenzy. What happiness could be achieved by flinging Blanchard into prison for a few months at most? What salve could be won from thought of this man's disgrace and social ruin? The spectacle sank into pettiness now. His blood was surging through his veins and crying for action. Primitive passion gripped him and craved primitive outlet. At that hour, in his own deepest degradation, the man came near madness and every savage voice in him shouted for blood and blows and batterings in the flesh.

Phoebe Blanchard hastened home, meanwhile, and kept her own counsel upon the subject of the dawn's sensational incidents. Her first instinct was to tell

her husband everything at the earliest opportunity, but Will had departed to his work before she reached the farm, and on second thoughts she hesitated to speak or give John Grimbald's message. She feared to precipitate the inevitable. In her own heart what mystery revolved about Will's past performances undoubtedly embraced the child fashioned in his likeness; and though she had long fought against the rumour and deceived herself by pretending to believe Chris, whose opinion differed from that of most people, yet at her heart she felt truth must lie hidden somewhere in the tangle. Will and Mr. Lyddon alone knew nothing of the report, and Phoebe hesitated to break it to her husband. He was happy—perhaps in the consciousness that nobody realised the truth; and yet at his very gates a bitter foe guessed at part of his secret and knew the rest. Still Phoebe could not bring herself to speak immediately. A day of mental stress and strain ended, and she retired and lay beside Will very sad. Under darkness of night the threats of the enemy grew into an imminent disaster of terrific dimensions, and with haunting fear she finally slept, to waken in a nightmare.

Will, wholly ignorant of the facts, soothed Phoebe's alarm and calmed her as she clung to him in hysterical tears.

'No ill shall come to 'e while I live,' she sobbed: 'not if all the airth speaks evil of 'e. I'll cleave to 'e, and fight for 'e; an' be a gude wife tu—a better wife than you've been husband.'

'Bide easy, an' doan't cry no more. My arm's round 'e, dearie. Theer, give awver, do! You've been dreamin' ugly along o' the poor supper you made, I reckon. Doan't 'e think nobody's hand against me now, for ban't so. Folks begin to see the manner of man I am; an' Miller knaws, which is all I care about.'

He've got a strong right arm workin' for him an' a tidy set o' brains, though I sez it; an' you might have a worse husband, tu, Phœbe; but theer—shut your purty eyes—I knaw they'm awpen still, for I can hear your lashes against the sheet. An' doan't 'e go out in the early dews mushrooming no more, for 'tis cold work, an' you've got to be strong these next months.'

She thought for a moment of telling him boldly concerning the legend spreading on every side; but, like others less near and dear to him, she feared to do so.

Knowing Will Blanchard, not a man among the back-biters had cared to risk a broken head by hinting openly at the startling likeness between the child and himself; and Phœbe felt her own courage unequal to the task just then. She racked her brains with his dangers long after he was himself asleep, and finally she determined to seek Chris next morning and hear her opinion before taking any definite step.

On the same night another pair of eyes were open, and trouble of a sort only less deep than that of the wife kept her father awake. Billy had taken an opportunity to tell his master of the general report and spread before him the facts as he knew them.

The younger members of the household had retired early, and when Miller Lyddon took the cards from the mantelpiece and made ready for their customary game, Mr. Blee shook his head and refused to play.

'Got no heart for cards to-night,' he said.

'What's amiss, then? Thank God I've heard little to call ill news for a month or two. Not but what I've fancied a shadow on my gal's face more'n wance.'

'If not on hers, wheer should 'e see it?' asked Mr. Blee eagerly. 'I've seed it tu, an' for that matter theer's sour looks an' sighs elsewheer. People ban't

blind, worse luck. 'Tis grawed to be common talk, an' I've fired myself to tell you, 'cause 'tis fitting an' right, an' it might come more grievous from less careful lips.'

'Go on, then; an' doan't rack me longer'n you can help. Use few words.'

'Many words must go to it, I reckon. 'Tis well knawn I unfolds a bit o' news like the flower of the field—gradual an' sure. You might have noticed that love-cheel by the name of Timothy 'bout the plaace? Him as be just of age to harry the ducks an' such like.'

'A nice li'l bwoy tu, an' fond of me; an' you caan't say he'm a love-cheel, knawing nothin' 'bout him.'

'Love-cheel or changeling, 'tis all wan. Have 'e ever thought 'twas coorious the way Blanchard comed by un?'

'Certainly 'twas—terrible coorious.'

'You never doubted it?'

'Why for should I? Will's truthful as light, whatever else he may be.'

'You believe as he went 'pon the Moor an' found that bwoy in a roundy-poundy under the gloamin'?''

'Ess, I do.'

'Have 'e ever looked at the laddie close?'

'Oftentimes—so like Will as two peas.'

'Theer 'tis! The picter of Will! How do 'e read that?'

'Never tried to. An accident, no more.'

'A damn queer accident, if you ax me. Burnish it all! You doan't see yet, such a genius of a man as you tu! Why, Will Blanchard's the faither of the li'l twoad! You've awnly got to knaw the laws of Nature an' such like to swear to it. The way he walks an' holds his head, his curls, his fashion of lording it awver the birds an' beasts, the sudden laugh of un—he's Will's son for a thousand pound, an' his mother's alive like as not.'

'No mother would have gived up a child that way.'

'Zactly so! Unless she gived it to the faither!' said Billy triumphantly.

Mr. Lyddon reflected and showed an evident disposition to scoff at the whole story.

'Tis stuff an' rubbish,' he said. 'You might as well find a mare's nest t' other side an' say 'twas Will's sister's child. 'Tis almost so like her as him, an' got her brown eyes in the bargain.'

'God forbid!' answered Billy, in horror. 'That's flat libel, an' I'd be the last to voice any such thing for money. If a man gets a cheel wrong side of the blanket 'tis just a passing sarcumstance, an' not to be took tu serious. Half-a-crown a week is its awn punishment like. But if a gal do, 'tis destruction to the end of the chapter, an' shame everlasting in the world to come by all accounts. You didn't ought to think o' such things, Miller, takin' a pure, gude maiden's carater like that. Surprised at 'e!'

'Tis just as mad a thought wan way as t' other, an' if you'm surprised, so be I. To be a tale-bearer at your time o' life!'

'That gormed Blanchard's bewitched 'e from fust to last!' burst out Billy. 'If a angel from heaven comed down-long and tawld 'e the truth 'bout un, you wouldn't b'lieve. God stiffen it! You make me mad! You'd stand 'pon your head an' waggle your auld legs in the air for un if he axed 'e.'

'I'll speak to him straight an' take his word for it. If it's true, he'm wickedly to blame, I knaw that.'

'I was thinkin' of your darter. 'Tis black thoughts have kept her waking since this reached her ears.'

'Did you tell her what people were sayin'? I warrant you did!'

'You'm wrong then. No such thing. I may have just heaved a sigh when I seed the bwoy playin' in front

of her, an' looked at Blanchard an' shook my head, or some such gentle hint as that. But no more.'

'Well, I doan't believe a word of it; an' I'll tell you this for your bettering: 'tis poor religion in you, Blee, to root into other people's troubles, like a pig in a trough; an' auld though you be, you'm not tu auld to mind what it felt like when the blood was hot an' quick to race at the sight of a maid.'

'I practise same as I preach, whether or no,' said Billy stoutly, 'an' I can't lay claim to creating nothing lawful or unlawful in my Maker's image. 'Tis something to say that, in these godless days. I've allus kept my foot on the world, the flesh, an' the Devil, so tight as the best Christian in company; an' if that ban't a record for a stone, p'raps you'll tell me a better. Your two-edged tongue do make me feel sometimes as though I did ought to go right away from 'e, though God knows—God, He knows——'

Billy hid his face and began to weep, while Mr. Lyddon watched the candlelight converge to a shining point upon his bald skull.

'Doan't go against a word in season, my dear sawl. 'Tis our duty to set each other right. That's what we'm put here for, I doubt. Many's the time you've given me gude advice, an' I've thanked 'e an' took it.'

Then he went for the spirits and mixed Mr. Blee a dose of more than usual strength.

'You'm the most biting user of language in Chagford, when you mind to speak sour,' declared Billy. 'If I thought you meant all you said, I'd go an' hang myself in the barn this instant moment. But you doan't.'

He snuffled and dried his scanty tears on a red handkerchief, then cheered up and drank his liquor.

'It do take all sorts to make a world, an' a man

must act accordin' as he'm built,' continued Mr. Lyddon. 'Ban't no more use bein' angered wi' a chap given to women than 'tis bein' angered wi' a fule, because he's a fule. What do 'e expect from a fule but folly, or a crab-tree but useless fruit, or hot blood but the ways of it? This ban't to speak of Will Blanchard, though. 'Pon him we'll say no more till he've heard what's on folks' tongues. A maddening bwoy—I'll allow you that—an' he've took a year or two off my life wan time an' another. 'Pears I ban't never to grow to love un as I would; an' yet I caan't quite help it when I sees his whole-hearted ferment to put money into my pocket; or when I hears him talk of nitrates an' the ways o' the world; or watches un playin' make-believe wi' the childer—himself the biggest cheel as ever laughed at fulishness or wanted spankin' an' putting in the corner.'

CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT

On the following morning Miller Lyddon arose late, looked from his window and immediately observed the twain with whom his night thoughts had been concerned. Will stood at the gate smoking; small Timothy, and another lad of slightly riper years, appeared close by. The children were fighting tooth and nail upon ownership of a frog, and this reptile itself, fastened by the leg to a stick, listlessly watched the progress of the battle. Will likewise surveyed the scene with genial attention, and encouraged the particular little angry animal who had most claim upon his interest. Timothy kicked and struck out pretty straight, but fought in silence; the bigger boy screamed and howled and scratched.

'Vang into un, man, an' knock his ugly head off!' said Will encouragingly, and the babe to whom he spoke made renewed efforts as both combatants tumbled into the road, the devil in their little bright eyes, each puny muscle straining. Tim had his foe by the hair, and the elder was trying to bite his enemy's leg, when Martin Grimbald and Chris Blanchard approached from Rushford Bridge. They had met by chance and Chris was coming to the farm, while the antiquary had business elsewhere. Now a scuffle in a cloud of dust arrested them, and the woman, uninfluenced by considerations of sportsmanship, pounced upon Timothy, dragged him from his operations, and, turning to Will, spoke as Martin Grimbald had never heard her speak before.

'You, a grawed man, to stand theer an' see that gert wild beast of a bwoy tear this li'l wan like a savage tiger! Look at his sclowed faace all streaming wi' blood! 'Struth! I'd like to sarve you the same, an' I would for two pins! I'm shamed of 'e!'

'He hit wi' his fistes like a gude un,' said Will, grinning; 'an' he'm made o' the right stuff, I'll swear. Couldn't have done better if he was my awn son. I be gwaine to give un a braave toy bimeby. You see t'other kid's faace come to-morrow!'

Martin Grimbald watched Chris fondle the gasping Timothy, clean his wounds, calm his panting heart; then, as though a superhuman voice whispered in his ear, her secret stood solved, and the truth of Timothy's parentage confronted him in a lightning flash of the soul. He looked at Chris as a man might gaze upon a spectre; he stared at her and through her into her past; he pieced each part of the puzzle to its kindred parts until all stood complete; he read 'mother' in her voice, in her caressing hands and gleaming eyes as surely as man reads morning in the first light of dawn; and he marvelled that a thing so clear and naked had

been left to his discovery. The revelation shook him not a little, for he was familiar with the rumours concerning Tim's paternity, and had been disposed to believe them; but from the moment of the new thought's inception it gripped him, for he felt that the thing was true. As lamps, so ordered that the light of each may fall on the fringe of darkness where its fellow fades, and thus complete a chain of illumination, so the present discovery, duly considered, was but one point of truth revealing others. It made clear much that had not been easy to understand, and the tremendous fact rose in his mind as a link in such a perfect sequence of evidence that doubt actually vanished before he had lost sight of Chris and passed dumb-founded upon his way. Her lover's sudden death, her own disappearance, the child's advent at Newtake, and the woman's subsequent return—these main incidents connected a thousand others, and explained what little mystery still obscured the position. He pursued his road and marvelled as he went, how a tragedy so thinly veiled had thus escaped every eye. Within the story that Chris had told, this other story might be intercalated without convicting her of any spoken falsehood. Now he guessed at the reason why Timothy's mother had refused to marry him on his last proposal; then, thinking of the child, he knew Tim's father.

So he stood before the truth; and it filled his heart with some agony and some light. Examining his love in this revelation, he discovered strange things; and first that it was love only that had opened his eyes and enabled him to solve the secret at all. Nobody had made the discovery but himself, and he, of all men the least likely to come at any concern others desired to hide from him, had fathomed this great fact, had won it from the heart of unconscious Chris. His love widened and deepened into profound pity as he thought

of all that her secret and the preservation of it must have meant; and tears dimmed his eyes as he pictured her life since her lover's passing.

To him the discovery hurt Chris so little that for a time he underrated the effect of it upon other people. His affection rose clean above the unhappy fact, and it was some time before he began to appreciate the spectacle of Chris under the world's eye with the truth no longer hidden. Then a sense of his own helplessness overmastered him, he walked slowly, drew up at a gate and stood motionless, leaning over it. So silent did he stand and so long, that a stoat hopped across the road within two yards of him.

He realised to the full that he was absolutely powerless. Chris alone must disperse the rumours fastening on her brother if they were to be dispersed. He knew that she would not suffer any great cloud of unjust censure to rest upon Will, and he saw what a bitter problem must be overwhelming her. Nobody could help her and he, who knew, was as powerless as the rest. Then he asked himself if that last conviction was true. He probed the secret places of his mind to find an idea; he prayed for some chance spark or flash of genius to aid him before this trial; he mourned his own simple brains, so weak to aid him in this vital pass. But of all living men the accidental discovery was most safe with him. His heart went out to the secret mother, and he told himself that he would guard her mystery like gold.

It was strange in a nature so timorous that not once did a suspicion he had erred overtake him, and presently he wondered to observe how ancient this discovery of the motherhood of Chris had grown within his mind. It appeared as venerable as his own love for her. He yearned for power to aid; without conscious direction of his course he proceeded and strode along for hours.

Then he ate a meal of bread and cheese at an inn and tramped forward once more upon a winding road towards the village of Zeal.

Through his uncertainty, athwart the deep perplexity of his mind, moved hope and a shadowed joy. Within him rose again the vision of happiness once pictured and prayed for, once revived, never quite banished to the grey limbo of ambitions beyond fulfilment. Now realities saddened the thought of it and brought ambition within a new environment less splendid than the old. But, despite clouds, hope shone fairly forth at last. So a planet, that the eye has followed at twilight and then lost awhile, beams anew at dawn after lapse of days, and wheels in wide mazes upon some new background of the unchanging stars.

Elsewhere Mr. Lyddon braced himself to a painful duty, and had private speech with his son-in-law. Like a thunderbolt the circling suspicions fell on Will, and for a moment smothered his customary characteristics under sheer surprise.

The Miller spoke nervously, and walked up and down with his eyes averted.

'Ban't no gert matter, I hope, an' I won't keep 'e from your work five minutes. You've awnly got to say "No," an' theer's an end of it so far as I'm concerned. 'Tis this: have 'e noticed heads close together now an' again when you passed by of late?'

'Not me. Tu much business on my hands, I assure 'e. Coourse theer's envious whisperings, allus is when a man gets a high plaace same as what I have, thanks to his awn gude sense an' the wisdom of others as knaws what he's made of. But you trusted me wi' all your heart, an' you'll never live to mourn it.'

'I never want to. You'm grawing to be much to me by slow stages. Yet these here tales. This child

Timothy. Who's his faither, Will, an' who's his mother?'

'How the flaming hell should I knaw? I found him same as you finds a berry on a briar. That's auld history, surely?'

'The child grows so 'mazing like you, that even dim eyes such as mine can see it.'

A sudden flash of light came into Blanchard's face. Then the fire died as quickly as it had been kindled, and he grew calm.

'God A'mighty!' he said, in a voice hushed and awed. 'They think that! I lay that's why your darter's cried o' nights then, an' Chris have growed sad an' wisht in her ways, an' mother have pet the bwoy wan moment an' been short wi' un the next.'

He remained marvellously quiet under this attack, but amazement chiefly marked his attitude. Miller Lyddon, encouraged by this unexpected reasonableness, spoke again more sternly.

'The thing looks bad to a wife an' mother, an' 'tis my duty to ax 'e for a plain, straightforward answer 'pon it. Human nature's got a ugly trick of repeatin' itself in this matter, as we all knaws. But I'll say nought an' think nought till you answers me. Be the bwoy yourn or not? Tell me true, with your hand on this.'

He took his Bible from the mantelpiece, while Will, apparently cowed by the gravity of the situation, placed both palms upon it, then fixed his eyes solemnly upon Mr. Lyddon.

'As God in heaven's my judge, he ban't no cheel of mine, and I knaw nothing about him—no, nor yet his faither nor mother nor plaace of birth. I found un wheer I said, and if I've lied by a fraction, may God choke me as I stand here afore you.'

'An' I believe you to the bottom!' declared his father-in-law. 'I believe you as I hopes to be believed

myself, when I stands afore the Open Books an' says I've tried to do my duty. You've got me on your side, an' that's to say you'll have Phœbe an' your mother tu for certain.'

Then Blanchard's mood changed, and there came a tremendous rebound from the tension of the last few minutes. In the anti-climax following upon his oath, passion, chained awhile by astonishment, broke loose in a whirlwind.

'Let 'em believe or disbelieve, who cares?' he thundered out. 'Not me—not a curse for you or anybody, my awn blood or not my awn blood. To harbour lies against me! But women loves to believe bad most times.'

'Who said they believed it, Will? Doan't go mad now 'tis awver and done.'

'They *did* believe it; I knaw, I seed it in their faaces, come to think of it. 'Tis the auld song. I caan't do no right. Course I've got childer an' ruined maids in every parish of the Moor! God damn their lying, poisonous tongues, the lot of 'em. I'm sick of this rotten, lie-breeding hole, an' of purty near every sawl in it but mother. She never would think against me. An' me, so true to Phœbe as the honey-bee to his awn butt! I'll go—I'll get out of it—so help me I will—to a clean land, 'mongst clean-thinking folk, wheer men deal fair and judge a chap by his works. For a thought I'd wring the neck of the blasted child, by God I would!'

'He've done no wrong.'

'Nor me neither. I had no more hand in his getting than he had himself. Poor li'l brat; I'm sorry I spoke harsh of him. He was give me—he was give me—an' I wish to God he *was* mine. Anyways he shaan't come to no harm. I'll fight the lot of 'e for un, till he's auld enough to fight for hissself.'

Then Will burst out of Monks Barton and vanished. He passed far from the confines of the farm, roamed on to the high Moor, and nothing further was seen of him until the following day.

Those most concerned assembled after his departure and heard the result of the interview.

'Solemn as a minister he swore,' explained Mr. Lyddon; 'an' then, a'most before his hands was off the Book, he burst out like a screeching, ravin' hurricane. I half felt the oath was vain then, an' 'twas his real nature bubblin' up like.'

They discussed the matter, all save Chris, who sat apart, silent and abstracted. Presently she rose and left them, and faced her own trouble single-handed, as she had similarly confronted greater sorrows in the past.

She was fully determined to conceal her cherished secret still; yet not for the superficial reason that had occurred to any mind. Vast mental alterations had transformed Chris Blanchard since the death of Clement. Her family she scarcely considered now; no power of logic would have convinced her that she had wronged them or darkened their fame. In the past, indeed, not the least motive of her flight had centred in a fear of Will; but now she feared nobody, and her own misfortune held no shadow of sin or shame for her, looking back upon it. Those who had denied themselves her society or friendship upon this knowledge would have given her no pang to lose. She could feel fiercely still, as she looked back to the birth of her son and traced the long course of her sufferings; and she yet experienced occasional thrills of satisfaction in her weaker moments, when she lowered the mask and reflected, not without pride, on the strength and determination that had enabled her to keep her secret. But to reveal the truth now was a prospect altogether hateful in the eyes of Chris,

and she knew the reason. More than once had she been upon the brink of disclosure, since recent unhappy suspicions darkened Phœbe's life; but she had postponed the necessary step again and again, at one thought. Her fortitude, her apathy, her stoic indifference broke down, and left her all woman before one necessity of confession: her heart stood still when she remembered that Martin Grimbald must know and judge. His verdict she did, indeed, dread with all her soul, and his only; for him she had grown to love, and the thought of his respect and regard was precious to her. Everybody must know, everybody or nobody. For long she could conceive of no action clearing Will in the eyes of the wider circle who would not be content to take his word, and yet leaving herself uninvolved. Then the solution came. She would depart once more with the child. Such a flight was implicit confession, and could not be misunderstood. Martin must, indeed, know, but she would never see him after he knew. To face him after the truth had reached his ear seemed to Chris a circumstance too terrible to dwell upon. Her action, of course, proclaimed the parentage of Timothy, and freed Will from further slanderings; while for herself, through tears she saw the kind faces of the gipsy people and her life henceforth devoted to her little one.

To accentuate the significance of the act she determined to carry out her intention that same day, and during the afternoon opportunity offered. Her son, playing alone in the farmyard, came readily enough for a walk, and before three o'clock they had set out. The boy's face was badly scratched from his morning battle, but pain had ceased, and his injuries only served as an object of great interest to Timothy. Where water in ditch or puddle made a looking-glass he would stop to survey himself.

A spectator, aware of certain facts, had viewed the progress of Chris with some slight interest. Three ways were open to her, three main thoroughfares leading out of Chagford to places of parallel or greater importance. Upon the Moor road Will wandered in deep perturbation; on that to Okehampton walked another man, concerned with the same problem from a different aspect; the third highway led to Moreton; and thither Chris might have proceeded unchallenged. But a little public vehicle would be returning just then from the railway station. That the runaway knew, and therefore selected another path.

In her pocket was all the money that she had; in her heart was a sort of alloyed sorrow. Two thoughts shared her mind after she had decided upon a course of action. She wondered how quickly Tim would learn to call her 'Mother,' for that was the only sweet word life still held; yet of the child's father she did not think, for her mind, without special act of volition, turned and turned again to him upon whom the Indian summer of her love had descended.

CHAPTER IX

UNDER COSDON BEACON

BENEATH a region where the 'newtakes' straggle up Cosdon's eastern flank and mark a struggle between man and the giant beacon, Chris Blanchard rested awhile upon the grass by the highway. Tim, wrapped in a shawl, slept soundly beside his mother, and she sat with her elbows on her knees and one hand under her chin. It was already dusk; dark mist wreaths moved upon the Moor, and oncoming night winds sighed of

rain. Then a moment before her intended departure from this most solitary spot she heard footsteps upon the road. Not interested to learn anything of the passer-by, Chris remained with her eyes upon the ground, but the footsteps stopped suddenly before her, whereupon she looked up and saw Martin Grimbal.

After a perambulation of twenty miles he had now set his face homewards, and thus the meeting was accomplished. Utmost constraint at first marked the expression of both man and woman, and it was left for Martin to break the silence, for Chris only started at seeing him, but said nothing. Her mind, however, ranged actively upon the reason of Grimbal's sudden appearance, and she did not at first believe it accidental.

'Why, my dear, what is this? You have wandered far afield!'

He addressed her in unnatural tones, for surprise and emotion sent his voice up into his head, and it came thin and tremulous as a woman's. Even as he spoke Martin feared. From the knowledge gleaned by him that morning he suspected the meaning of this action, and thought that Chris was running away.

And she, at the same moment, divined that he guessed the truth in so far as her present position was concerned. Still she did not speak, and he grew calmer and took her silence as an admission.

'You're going away from Chagford? Is it wise?'

'Ess, Martin, 'tis best so. You see this poor child be breedin' trouble, an' bringing bad talk against Will. He ban't wanted—little Timothy—an' I ban't wanted overmuch, so it comed to me I'd—I'd just slip away out of the turmoil an' taake Tim. Then——'

She stopped, for her heart was beating so fast that she could speak no more. She remembered her own arguments in the recent past: that this flight must tell

all who cared to reflect that the child was her own. Now she looked up at Martin to see if he had guessed it. But he exhibited extreme self-control, and she was reassured.

‘Just like your thoughtful self to try and save others from sorrow. Where are you going to, Chris? Don’t tell me more than you please; but I may be useful to you on this, the first stage of the journey.’

‘To Okehampton to-night. To-morrow—but I’d rather not say any more. I don’t care so long as you think I’m right.’

‘I haven’t said that yet. But I’ll go as far as Zeal with you. Then we’ll get a covered cab or something. We may reach the village before rain.’

‘No call for your coming. ’Tis awnly a short mile.’

‘But I must. I’ll carry the laddie. Poor little man. Hard to be the cause of such a bother.’

He picked Timothy up so gently that the child did not wake.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘come along. You must be tired already.’

‘How gude you be!’ she said wearily. ‘I’m glad you doan’t scold or fall into a rage wi’ me, for I knaw I’m right. The bwoy’s better away, and I’m small use to any now. But I can be busy with this little wan. I might do worse than give up my life to un—eh, Martin?’

Then some power put words in his mouth. He trembled when he had spoken them, but he would not have recalled them.

‘You couldn’t do better, Chris. It’s a duty staring you in the face.’

She started violently, and her dark skin flamed under the night.

‘Why d’you say that?’ she asked, with loud, harsh

voice, and stopping still as she did so. 'Why d'you say "duty"?'

He, too, stood and looked at her.

'My dear,' he answered, 'love's a quick, subtle thing. It can even make such a man as I am less stupid than Nature built him. It fires dull brains, it adds sight to dim eyes; it shows the bookworm how to find out secrets hidden from keener spirits; it lifts a veil from the loved one and lets the lover see more than anybody else can. Be patient with me. I spoke because I love you still with all my heart and soul, Chris; I spoke, because what I feel for you is lifelong, and cannot change. Had I not still worshipped the earth under your feet, I would have died rather than tell you. But love makes me bold. I have watched you so long and prayed for you so often. I have seen little differences in you that nobody else saw. And to-day I know. I knew when you picked up Timothy and flew at Will. Since then I've wandered Heaven can tell where, just thinking and thinking and wondering and seeing no way. And all the time God meant me to come and find you and tell you.'

She understood; she gave one bitter cry that started an echo from ruined mine-workings hard at hand; then she turned from him, and, in a moment of sheer, hopeless misery, flung herself and her wrecked ambitions upon the ground by the wayside.

For a moment the man stood scared by this desperate answer to his words. Then he put his burden down, approached Chris, knelt beside her, and tried to raise her. She sat up at last with panting breast and eyes in which some terror sat.

'You!' she said. 'You to know! Wasn't my cup full enough before but that my wan hope should be cut away tu? My God, I'm auld in sorrow now—very auld. But 'tis awver at last. You know, an' I had to

hear it from your awn lips ! Theer's nought worse in the world for me now.'

Her hands were pressed against her bosom, and as he unconsciously moved a little towards her she shrank backwards, then rose to her feet. Timothy woke and cried, upon which she turned to him and picked him up.

'Go !' she cried suddenly. 'If ever you loved me, get out of my sight now, or you'll make me want to kill myself again.'

He saw the time was come for strong self-assertion, and spoke.

'Listen !' he said. 'You don't understand, but you must. I'm the only man in the world who knows—the only one, and I've told you because it was stamped into my brain to tell you, and because I love you perhaps better than one creature has any right to love another.'

'You know. Isn't it enough? Who else did I care for? Who else mattered to me? Mother or brother or other folk? I pray you to go an' leave me. God knaws how hard it was to hide it, but I hugged it an' suffered more'n any but a mother could fathom 'cause things weer as they weer. Then came this trouble, an' still none seed. But 'twas meant you should, an' the rest doan't matter. I'd so soon go back now as not.'

'So you shall,' he answered calmly ; 'only hear this first. Last time I spoke about what was in my heart, Chris, you told me you could love me, but that you would not marry me, and I said I would never ask you again. I shall keep my word, sweetheart. I shall not ask ; I shall take without asking. You love me ; that is all I care for. The little boy came between last time ; now nothing does.'

He took the woman in his arms and kissed her, but

the next moment he was flying where water lay in a ditch, for his unexpected attitude had overpowered Chris. She raised her hands to his shoulders, uttered a faint cry, then slipped heavily out of his arms in a faint. The man rushed this way and that, the child sat and howled noisily, the woman remained long unconscious, and heavy rain began to fall out of the darkness; yet, until his dying day that desolate spot of earth brought light to Martin's eyes as often as he passed it.

Chris presently recovered her senses, and spoke words that made her lover's heart leap. She uttered them in a sad, low voice, but her hand was in his, pressing it close the while.

'Awften an' awften I've axed the A'mighty to give me wan little glint o' knowledge as how 'twould all end. If I'd knawed! But I never guessed how big your sawl was, Martin. I never thought you was the manner of man to love a woman arter that.'

'God knows what's in my heart, Chris.'

'I'll tell 'e everything some day. Lookin' back it doan't 'pear no ways wicked, though it may seem so in cold daylight to cold hearts.'

'Come, come with me, for the rain grows harder. I know where I can hire a covered carriage at an inn. 'Tis only five minutes further on, and poor Tim's unhappy.'

'He'm hungry. You won't be hard 'pon my li'l bwoy if I come to 'e, Martin?'

'You know as well as I can tell you. There's one other thing. About Chagford, Chris? Are you afraid of it? I'll turn my back on it if you like. I'll take you to Okehampton now if you would rather go there.'

'Never! 'Tis for you to care, not me. So you knaw an' forgive—what's the rest? Shadows. But let me hold your hand an' keep my tongue still. I'm

sick an' fainty wi' this gert turn o' the wheel. 'Tis tu deep for any words.'

He felt not less uplifted, but his joy was a man's. It rolled and tumbled over his being like the riotous west wind. Under such stress his mind could find no worthy thing to say, and yet he was intoxicated and had to speak. He was very unlike himself. He uttered platitudes; then the weight of Timothy upon his arm reminded him that the child existed.

'He shall go to a good school, Chris?'

She sighed.

'I wish I could die quick here by the roadside, dear Martin, for living along with you won't be no happier than I am this moment. My thoughts do all run back, not forward. I've lived long enough, I reckon. If I'd told 'e! But I'd rather been skinned alive than do it. I'd have let the rest knaw years ago but for you.'

Driving homewards half an hour later Chris Blanchard told Martin that part of her story which concerned her life after the birth of Timothy.

'The travellin' people was pure gawld to me,' she said. 'And theer's much to say of theer gert gude-ness. But I can tell 'e that another time. It chanced the very day Will's li'l wan was buried we was to Chagford, an' the sad falling-out quickened my awn mind as to a thought 'bout my cheel. It comed awver me to leave un at Newtake. I left the vans wheer they was camped that afternoon, an' hid 'pon the hill wi' the baaby. Then Will comed out hisself, an' I chaanged my thought an' followed un wheer he roamed, knawin' the colour of his mind, through them black hours as if 'twas my awn. 'Twas after he'd left the roundy-poundy wheer he was born that I put my child in it, then called to un loud an' clear. He never

knawed the voice, which was the awnly thing I feared. But a voice long silent be soon forgot. I bided at hand till I saw the bwoy in brother Will's arms. An' then I knawed 'twas well an' that mother would come to see it. Arterwards I suffered very terrible wi'out un. But I fought wi' myself an' kept away up to the time I'd fixed in my mind. That was so as nobody should link me with the li'l wan in theer thoughts. Waitin' was the hard deed, and seein' my bwoy for the first time when I went to Newtake was hard tu. But 'tis all wan now.'

She remained silent until the lengthy ride was ended and her mother's cottage reached. Then, as that home she thought to enter no more appeared again, the nature of the woman awoke for one second, and she flung herself on Martin's heart.

'May God make me half you think me, for I love you true, an' you 'm the best man ever He fashioned,' she said. 'An' to-morrow's Sunday,' she added in-consequently, 'an' I'll kneel in church an' call down lifelong blessings on 'e.'

'Don't go to-morrow, my darling. And yet—but no, we'll not go, either of us. I couldn't hear my own banns read out for the world, and I don't think you could; yet read they'll be as sure as the service is held.'

She said nothing, but he knew that she felt; then mother and child were gone, and Martin, dismissing his vehicle, proceeded to Monks Barton with the news that all was well.

Mrs. Blanchard heard her daughter's story and its sequel. She exhibited some emotion, but no grief. The sorrow she may have suffered was never revealed to any eye by word or tear.

'I reckoned of late days theer was Blanchard blood to the child,' she said, 'an' I won't hide from you I

thought more'n wance you was so like to be the mother as Will the faither of un. Go to bed now if you caan't eat an' taake the bwoy, an' thank God for lining your dark cloud with this silver. If He forgives 'e an' this here gude grey Martin forgives 'e, who be I to fret? Worse'n you've been forgiven at fust hand by the Lard when He travelled on flesh and blood feet 'mong men; an' folks have short memories for dates, an' them as sniggers now will be dust or dotards 'fore Tim's grawed. When you've been a lawful wife ten year an' more, who's gwaine to mind this? Not little Tim's fellow bwoys an' gals anyway. His awn generation won't trouble him, an' he'll find a wise guardian in Martin an' a lovin' gran'mother in me. Dry your eyes an' be a Blanchard. God A'mighty sends sawls in the world His awn way, an' chooses the faithers an' mothers for 'em; an' He's never taught Nature to go second to parson yet, worse luck. 'Tis done, an' to grumble at a dead man's doin's—specially if you caan't mend 'em—be vain.'

'My share was half, an' not less,' said Chris.

'Ay, you say so, but 'tis a deed wheer the blame ban't awften divided equal,' answered Mrs. Blanchard. 'Wheer's the maiden as caan't wait for her weddin' bells?'

The use of the last two words magically swept Chris back into the past. The coincidence was curious, and she remembered when a man, destined never to listen to such melody, declared impatiently that he heard it in the hidden heart of a summer day long past. She did not reply to her mother, but arose and took her child and went to rest.

CHAPTER X

BAD NEWS FOR BLANCHARD

ON the morning that saw the wedding of Chris and Martin, Phœbe Blanchard found heart and tongue to speak to her husband of the thing she still kept locked within her mind. Since the meeting with John Grimbald she had suffered much in secret, but still kept silence; and now, after a quiet service before breakfast on a morning in mid-December, most of those who had been present as spectators returned to the valley, and Phœbe spoke to Will as they walked apart from the rest. A sight of the enemy it was that loosed her lips, for, much to the surprise of all present, John Grimbald had attended his brother's wedding. As the little gathering streamed away after the ceremony, he had galloped off again, and the incident now led to greater things.

'Chill fashion weddin',' said Will, as he walked homewards, 'but it 'pears to me all Blanchards be fated to wed coorious. Well, 'tis a gude matter out o' hand. I knaw I raged somethin' terrible come I fust heard it, but I think differ'nt now, specially when I mind what Chris must have felt those times she seed me welting her child an' heard un yell, yet set her teeth an' never shawed a sign.'

'Did 'e note Jan Grimbald theer?'

'I seed un, an' I catched un wi' his eye on you more'n wance. He's grawed to look nowadays as if his mouth allus had a sour plum in it.'

'His brain's got sour stuff hid in it if his mouth haven't. Be you ever feared of un?'

'Not me. Why for should I be? He'll be wan of

the fam'ly like now. He caan't keep his passion alive for ever. We'm likely to meet when Martin do come home again from honeymooning.'

'Will, I must tell you something—something gert an' terrible. I should have told 'e 'fore now but I was frightened.'

'Not feared to speak to me?'

'Ess, seeing the thing I had to say. I've waited weeks in fear an' tremblin' expecting something to happen an' all weighed down with fright an' dread. Now, what wi' the cheel that's comin', I caan't carry this any more.'

Being already lachrymose after the manner of women at a wedding, Phoebe now shed a tear or two. Will thereupon spoke words of comfort, and blamed her for hiding any matter from him.

'More trouble?' he said. 'Yet I doan't think it—not now, just as I be right every way. I guess 'tis your state makes you queer an' glumpy.'

'I hope 'twas vain talk an' not true anyway.'

'More talk 'bout me? You'd think Chagford was most tired o' my name, wouldn't 'e? Who was it now?'

'Him—Jan Grimbald. I met him 'mong the mushrooms. He burst out an' said wicked, awful things, but his talk touched the little bwoy. He thought Tim was yourn an' he was gwaine to do mischief against you.'

'Damn his black mind! I wonder he haven't rotted away wi' his awn bile 'fore now.'

'But that weern't all. He talked an' talked, an' threatened if you didn't go an' see him, as he'd tell 'bout you in the past, when you was away that autumn-time 'fore us was married.'

'Did he, by God! Doan't he wish he knawed!'

'He does knaw, Will—least he said he did.'

'Never dream it, Phoebe. 'Tis a lie. For why?'

Cause if he did knaw I shouldn't—but theer, I've never tawld 'e, an' I ban't gwaine to now. Awnly I'll say this: if Grimbald really knawed he'd have—but he can't knaw, and theer's an end of it.'

'To think I should have been frightened by such a story all these weeks! An' not true. Oh! I wish I'd told 'e when he sent the message. 'Twould have saved me so much.'

'Ess, never keep nothin' from me, Phœbe. Theer's troubles that might crush wan heart as comes a light load divided between two. What message?'

'Some silly auld story 'bout a suit of grey clothes. He said I was to tell 'e the things was received by the awner.'

Will Blanchard stood still so suddenly that it seemed as though magic had turned him into a stone. He stood and his hands unclasped, and Phœbe's "church service," which he carried, fell with a thud into the road. His wife watched him change colour, and noted in his face an expression she had never before seen there.

'Christ A'mighty!' he whispered, with his eyes reflecting a world of sheer amazement and even terror; he *does* knaw!'

'What? Knaw what, Will? For the Lard's sake doan't 'e look at me like that; you'll frighten my heart into my mouth.'

'To think he knawed an' watched an' waited all these years! The spider patience o' that man! I see how 'twas. He let the world have its way an' thought to see me broken wi'out any trouble from him. Then, when I conquered, an' got to Miller's right hand, an' beat the world at its awn game, he——an' been nursing this against me! The heart of un!'

He spoke to himself aloud, gazing straight before him at nothing.

'Will, tell me what 'tis. Caan't your awn true wife help 'e now or never?'

Recalled by her words he came to himself, picked up her book and walked on. She spoke again and then he answered—

'No, 'tis a coil wheer you caan't do nought—nor nobody. The power o' waitin'—'tis that I never heard tell of. I thought I knawed what was in men to the core—me, thirty years of age, an' a ripe man if ever theer was wan. But this malice! 'Tis enough to make 'e b'lieve in the devil.'

'What have you done?' she cried aloud. 'Tell me the worst of it, an' how gert a thing he've got against you.'

'Bide quiet,' he answered. 'I'll tell 'e, but not on the public road. Not but he'll take gude care every ear has it presently. Shut your mouth now an' come up to our chamber arter breakfast an' I'll tell 'e the rights of it. An' that dog knawed an' could keep it close all these years!'

'He's dangerous, an' terrible, an' strong. I see it in your faace, Will.'

'So he is then; ban't no foxin' you 'bout it now. 'Tis an awful power of waitin' he've got; an' he haven't bided his time these years an' years for nothin'. A feast to him I lay. He've licked his damned lips many a score o' times to think of the food he'd fat his vengeance with bimebye.'

'Can 'e taake you from me? If not, I'll bear it.'

'Ess fay, I'm done for; credit, fortune, all gone. It might have been death if us had been to war at the time.'

She clung to him and her head swam.

'Death! God's mercy! you've never killed nobody, Will?'

'Not as I knaws on, but p'raps ban't tu late to mend

it. It freezes me—it freezes my blood to think what his thoughts have been. No, no, ban't death or anything like that. But 'tis prison for sure if——'

He broke off and his face was very dark.

'What, Will? If what? Oh, comfort me, comfort me, Will, for God's sake! An' another li'l wan comin'!'

'Doan't take on,' he said. 'Ban't my way to squeal till I'm hurt. Let it bide, an' be bright an' cheery come eating, for mother's down in the mouth at losin' Chris, though she don't shaw it.'

Mrs. Blanchard, with little Timothy, joined the breakfast-party at Monks Barton, and, a certain gloom hanging over the party, Mr. Blee commented upon it in his usual critical spirit.

'This here givin' in marriage do allus make a looker-on down in the mouth if he's a sober-minded sort o' man. 'Tis the contrast between the courageousness of the two poor sawls jumpin' into the state, an' the solid fact of bein' a man's wife or a woman's husband for all time. The vows they swear! An' that Martin's voice so strong an' cheerful! A teeming cause o' broken oaths the marriage sarvice; yet each new pair comes along like sheep to the slaughter.'

'You talk like a bachelor man,' said Damaris.

'Not so, Mrs. Blanchard, I assure 'e! Lookers-on see most of the game. Ban't the mite as lives in a cheese what can tell 'e 'bout the flavour of un. Look at a married man at a weddin'—all broadcloth an' cheerfulness, like the fox as have lost his tail an' girns to see another chap in the same pickle.'

'Yet you tried blamed hard to lose your tail an' get a wife for all your talk,' said Will, who, although his mind was full enough, yet could generally find a sharp word for Mr. Blee.

'Bah to you!' answered the old man angrily,

'*That* for you! 'Tis allus your way to bring personal talk into high conversation. I was improvin' the hour with general thoughts; but the vulgar tone you give to a discourse would muzzle the wisdom o' Solomon.'

Miller Lyddon here made an effort to re-establish peace and soon afterwards the meal came to an end.

Half an hour later Phœbe heard from her husband the story of his brief military career, of how he had enlisted as a preliminary to going abroad and making his fortune, how he had become servant to one Captain Tremayne, how upon the news of Phœbe's engagement he had deserted, and how his intention to return and make a clean breast of it had been twice changed by the circumstances that followed his marriage. Long he took in detailing every incident and circumstance.

'Coming to think,' he said, 'of coourse 'tis clear as Grimbal must know my auld master. I seed his name raised to a Major in the *Western Morning News* a few year ago, an' he was to Okehampton with a battalion when Hicks come by his death. So that's how 'tis; an' I ban't gwaine to bide Grimbal's time to be ruined, you may be very sure of that. Now I knaw, I act.'

'He may be quite content you should knaw. That's meat an' drink enough for him, to think of you gwaine in fear day an' night.'

'Ess, but that's not my way. I ban't wan to wait an enemy's pleasure.'

'You won't go to him, Will?'

'Go to un? Ess fay—'fore the day's done tu.'

'That's awnly to hasten the end.'

'The sooner the better.'

He tramped up and down the bedroom with his eyes on the ground, his hands in his pockets.

'A tremendous thing to tumble up on the surface arter all these years; an' a tremendous time for it to

come. 'Twas a crime 'gainst the Queen for my own gude ends. I had to choose 'tween her an' you ; I'd do the same to-morrow. The fault weern't theer. It lay in not gwaine back.'

'You couldn't ; your arm was broke.'

'I ought to have gone back arter 'twas well. Then time had passed, an' uncle's money comed, an' they never found me. But theer it lies ahead now, sure enough.'

'Perhaps, for sheer shame, he'll bide quiet 'bout it. A man caan't hate another man for ever.'

'I thought not, same as you, but Grimbald shaws we'm wrong.'

'Let us go then ; let us do what you thought to do 'fore faither comed forward so kind. Let us go away to furrin' paarts even now.'

'I doubt if he'd let me go. 'Tis mouse an' cat for the minute. Leastways so he's thought since he talked to 'e. But he'll knaw differ'nt 'fore he lies in his bed to-night. Must be cut an' dried an' settled.'

'Be slow to act, Will, an'——'

'Theer ! theer !' he said, 'doan't 'e offer me no advice, theer's a gude gal, 'cause I couldn't stand it even from you, just this minute. God knaws I'm not above takin' it in a general way, for the best tried man can larn from babes an' sucklings sometimes ; but this is a thing calling for nothin' but shut lips. 'Tis my job, an' I've got to see it through my own way.'

'You'll be patient, Will ? 'Tisn't like other times when you was right an' him wrong. He's got the whip hand of 'e, so you mustn't dictate.'

'Not me. I can be reasonable an' just as any man. I never hid from myself I was doin' wrong at the time. But, when all's said, this auld history's got two sides to it—'specially if you remember that 'twas through John Grimbald's awn act I had to do a wrong thing to

save you doin' a worse wan. He'll have to be reasonable likewise. 'Tis man to man.'

Will's conversation lasted another hour, but Phœbe could not shake his determination, and after dinner Blanchard departed to the Red House, his destination being known to his wife only.

But while Will marched upon this errand, the man he desired to see had just left his own front door, struck through leafless coppices of larch and silver beech that approached the house, and then proceeded to where bigger timber stood about a little plateau of marshy land, surrounded by tall flags. The woodlands had paid their debt to Nature in good gold, and all the trees were naked. An east wind lent a hard, clean clearness to the country. In the foreground two little lakes spread their waters steel-grey in a cup of lead; the distance was clear and cold and compact of all sober colours save only where, through a grey and interlacing nakedness of many boughs, the roof of the Red House rose.

John Grimbald sat upon a felled tree beside the pools, and while he remained motionless, his pipe unlighted, his gun beside him, a spaniel worked below in the sere sedges at the water's margin. Presently the dog barked, a moor-hen splashed half-flying, half-swimming across the larger lake, and a snipe got up and jerked crookedly away on the wind. The dog stood with one fore-paw lifted and the water dripping along his belly. He waited for a crack and puff of smoke and the thud of a bird falling into the water or the under-wood. But his master did not fire; he did not even see the flushing of the snipe; so the dog came up and remonstrated with his eyes. Grimbald patted the beast's head, then rose from his seat on the felled tree, stretched his arms, sat down again and lighted his pipe.

The event of the morning had turned his thoughts in the old direction, and now they were wholly occupied with Will Blanchard. Since his fit of futile spleen and fury after the meeting with Phœbe, John had slowly sunk back into the former nerveless attitude. From this an occasional wonder roused him—a wonder as to whether the woman had ever given her husband his message at all. His recent active hatred seemed a little softened, though why it should be so he could not have explained. Now he sometimes assured himself that he should not proceed to extremities, but hang his sword over Will's head awhile and possibly end by pardoning him altogether.

Thus he paltered with his better part and presented a spectacle of one mentally sick unto death by reason of shattered purpose. His unity of design was gone. He had believed the last conversation with Phœbe in itself sufficient to waken his pristine passion, but anger against himself had been a great factor of that storm, apart from which circumstance he made the mistake of supposing that his passion slept, whereas in reality it was dead. Now, if Grimbald was to be stung into activity, it must be along another line, and upon a fresh count.

Then, as he reflected by the little tarns, there approached Will Blanchard himself; and Grimbald, looking up, saw him standing among white tussocks of dead grass by the water-side and rubbing the mud off his boots upon them. For a moment his breath quickened, but he was not surprised; and yet, before Will reached him, he had time to wonder at himself that he was not.

Blanchard, calling at the Red House ten minutes after the master's departure, had been informed by old Lawrence Vallack, John's factotum, that he had come too late. It transpired, however, that Grimbald had

taken his gun and a dog, so Will, knowing the estate, made a guess at the sportsman's destination, and was helped on his way when he came within earshot of the barking spaniel.

Now that animal resented his intrusion, and for a moment it appeared that the brute's master did also. Will had already seen Grimbald where he sat, and came swiftly towards him.

'What are you doing here, William Blanchard? You're trespassing and you know it,' said the landowner loudly. 'You can have no business here.'

'Haven't I? Then why for do 'e send me messages?'

Will stood straight and stern in front of his foe. His face was more gloomy than the sombre afternoon; his jaw stood out very square; his grey eyes were hard as the glint of the east wind. He might have been accuser, and John Grimbald accused. The sportsman did not move from his seat upon the log. But he felt a flush of blood pulse through him at the other's voice, as though his heart, long stagnant, was being sluiced.

'That? I'd forgotten all about it. You've taken your time in obeying me.'

'This marnin', an' not sooner, I heard what you telled her when you caught Phœbe alone.'

'Ah! now I understand the delay. Say what you've got to say, please, and then get out of my sight.'

''Tis for you to speak, not me. What be you gwaine to do, an' when be you gwaine to do it? I allow you've bested me, God knaws how; but you've got me down. So the sooner you say what your next step is the better.'

The older man laughed.

''Tisn't the beaten party makes the terms as a rule.'

'I want no terms; I wouldn't make terms with you for a sure plaace in heaven. Tell me what you be gwaine to do against me. I've a right to knaw.'

'I can't tell you.'

'You mean as you won't tell me?'

'I mean I can't—not yet. After speaking to your wife I forgot all about it. It doesn't interest me.'

'Be you gwaine to give me up?'

'Probably I shall—as a matter of duty. I'm a bit of a soldier myself. It's such a dirty coward's trick to desert. Yes, I think I shall make an example of you.'

Will looked at him steadily.

'You want to wake the devil in me—I see that. But you won't. I'm aulder an' wiser now. So you'm to give me up? I knawed it wi'out axin'.'

'And that doesn't wake you?'

'No. Seein' why I deserted an' mindin' your share in drivin' me.'

Grimbal did not answer, and Will asked him to name a date.

'I tell you I shall suit myself, not you. When you will like it least, be sure of that. I needn't pretend what I don't feel. I hate the sight of you still, and the closer you come the more I hate you. It rolls years off me to see your damned brown face so near, and hear your voice in my ear. Years and years; and I'm glad it does. You've ruined my life, and I'll ruin yours yet.'

There was a pause; Blanchard stared cold and hard into Grimbal's eyes; then John continued, and his flicker of passion cooled a little as he did so.

'At least that's what I said to myself when first I heard this little bit of news—that I'd ruin you: now I'm not sure.'

'At least I'll thank you to make up your mind. 'Tis turn an' turn about. You be uppermost just this minute. As to ruining me, that's as may be.'

'Well, I shall decide presently. I suppose you

won't run away. And it's no great matter if you do, for a fool can't hide himself under his folly.'

'I shan't run. I want to get through with this and have it behind me.'

'You're in a hurry now.'

'It's just an' right. I knaw that. An' ban't no gert odds who's informer. But I want to have it behind me—an' you in front. Do 'e see? This out o' hand, then it's my turn again. Keepin' me waitin' 'pon such a point be tu small an' womanish for a fight between men. 'Tis your turn to hit, Jan Grimbald, an' theer's no guard 'gainst the stroke, so if you're a man, hit an' have done with it.'

'Ah! you don't like the thought of waiting!'

'No, I do not. I haven't got your snake's patience. Let me have what I've got to have, an' suffer it, an' make an end of it.'

'You're in a hurry for a dish that won't be pleasant eating, I assure you.'

'It's just an' right, I tell 'e; an' I knaw it is, though all these years cover it. Your paart's differ'nt. I lay you'm in a worse hell than me, even now.'

'A moralist! How d'you like the thought of a damned good flogging—fifty lashes laid on hot and strong?'

'Doan't you wish you had the job? Thrashing of a man wi' his legs an' hands tied would just suit your sort o' courage.'

'As to that, they won't flog you really; and I fancy I could thrash you still without any help. Your memory's short. Never mind. Get you gone now; and never speak to me again as long as you live, or I shall probably hit you across the mouth with my riding-whip. As to giving you up, you're in my hands and must wait my time for that.'

'Must I, by God? Hark to a fule talkin'! Why

should I wait your pleasure, an' me wi' a tongue in my head? You've jawed long enough. Now you can listen. I'll give *myself* up, so theer! I'll tell the truth, an' what drove me to desert, an' what you be anyway—as goes ridin' out wi' the yeomanry so braave in black an' silver with your sword drawed! That'll spoil your market for pluck an' valour anyways. An' when I've done all court-martial gives me, I'll come back!

He swung away as he spoke; and the other sat on motionless for an hour after Will had departed.

John Grimbal's pipe went out; his dog, weary of waiting, crept to his feet and fell asleep there; live fur and feathers peeped about and scanned his bent figure, immobile as a tree trunk that supported it; and the gun, lying at hand, drew down a white light from a gathering gloaming.

One great desire was in the sportsman's mind; he already found himself hungry for another meeting with Blanchard.

CHAPTER XI

PHŒBE TAKES THOUGHT

THAT night Will sat and smoked in his bedroom and talked to Phœbe, who had already gone to rest. She looked over her knees at him with round, sad eyes; while beside her in a cot slept her small daughter. A candle burned on the mantelpiece and served to illuminate one or two faded pictures: a daguerreotype of Phœbe as a child sitting on a donkey, and an ancient silhouette of Miller Lyddon, cut for him on his visit to the Great Exhibition. In a frame beneath these appeared the photograph of little Will, who had died at Newtake.

'He thinks he be gwaine to bide his time an' let me stew an' sweat for it,' said the man moodily.

'Awnly a born devil could tell such wickedness. Ban't theer no ways o' meetin' him now you knaw? If you 'd speak to faither——'

'What 's the use bringing sorrow on his grey hairs?'

'Well, it's got to come; you knaw that. Grimbald isn't the man to forgive.'

'Forgive! That would be worst of all. If he forgived me now I'd go mad. Wait till I've had soldier law, then us'll talk 'bout forgiving arter.'

Phœbe shivered and began to cry helplessly, drying her eyes upon the sheet.

'Theer—theer,' he said; 'doan't be a cheel. We'm made o' stern stuff, you an' me. 'Tis awnly a matter of years, I s'pose, an' the reason I went may lessen the sentence a bit. Mother won't never turn against me, an' so long as your faither can forgive, the rest of the world's welcome to look so black as it pleases.'

'Faither'll forgive 'e.'

'He might—just wance more. He've got to onderstand my points better late days.'

'Come an' sleep then, an' fret no more till marnin' light anyway.'

''Tis the thing hidden, hanging over my head, biding behind every corner. I caan't stand it; I caan't wait for it. I'll grow sheer devil if I've got to wait; an', so like as not, meet un faace to faace some day, an' send un wheer neither his bark nor bite will harm me. Ess fay—solemn truth. I won't answer for it. I can put so tight a hand 'pon myself as any man since Job, but to sit down under this——'

'Theer's nought else you can do,' said Phœbe. She yawned as she spoke, but Will's reply strangled the yawn and effectually woke her up.

'So Jan Grimbald said, an' I blamed soon shawed un

he was out. Theer's a thing I can do an' shall do. 'Twill sweep the ground from under un; 'twill blaw off his vengeance harmless as a gun fired in the air; 'twill turn his malice so sour as beer after thunder. I be gwaine to give myself up—then us'll see who's the fule!'

Phœbe was out of bed with her arms round her husband in a moment.

'No, no—never. You couldn't, Will; you daren't—'tis against nature. You ban't free to do no such wild thing. You forget me, an' the li'l maid, an' t'other comin'!'

'Doan't 'e choke me,' he said; 'an' doan't look so terrified. Your small hands caan't keep off what's ahead o' me; an' I wouldn't let 'em if they could. 'Tis in this world that a chap's got to pay for his sins most times, an' damn short credit tu, so far as I can see. So what they want to bleat 'bout hell fire for I've never onderstood, seeing you get your change here. Anyway, so sure as I do a trick that ban't 'zactly wise, the whip's allus behind it—the whip——'

He repeated the word in a changed voice, for it reminded him of what Grimbald had threatened. He did not know whether there might be truth in it. His pride winced and gasped. He thought of Phœbe seeing his bare back perhaps years afterwards. A tempest of rage blackened his face and he spoke in a voice hoarse and harsh.

'Get up an' go to bed. Doan't whine, for God's sake, or you'll drive me daft. I've paid afore, an' I'll pay again; an' may the Lard help him who ever owes me ought. No mercy have I ever had from living man—'cept Miller—none will I ever shaw.'

'Not to-morrow, Will—not this week. Promise that, an' I'll get into bed an' bide quiet. For your love o' me just leave it till arter Christmas time.

Promise that, else you'll kill me. No, no, no—you shaan't shout me down 'pon this. I'll cry to 'e while I've got life left. Promise not till Christmas be past.'

'I'll promise nothing. I must think in the peace o' night. Go to sleep an' bide quiet, else you'll wake the li'l gal.'

'I won't—I won't—I'll never sleep again. Caan't 'e think o' me so well as yourself—you as be allus thinking o' me? Ban't I to count in an awful pass like this? I'm no fair-weather wife, as you knaws by now. If you gives yourself up, I'll kill myself. You think I couldn't, but I could. What's my days away from you?'

'Hush, hush!' he said. 'Be you mad? 'Tis a matter tu'small for such talk as that.'

'Promise then, promise you'll be dumb till arter Christmas.'

'So I will, if you'm that set on it; but if you knawed what waitin' meant to the likes o' me, you wouldn't ax. You've got my word, now keep quiet, theer's a dear love, an' dry your eyes.'

He put her into bed, and soon stretched himself beside her. Then she clung to him as though powers were already dragging him away for ever. Will, bored and weary, was sorry for his wife with all his soul, and kept grunting words of good cheer and comfort as he sank to sleep. She still begged and prayed for delay, and by her importunity made him promise at last that he would take no step until after New Year's Day. Then, finding she could win no more in that direction, Phoebe turned to another aspect of the problem, and began to argue with unexpected if sophistic skill. Her tears were now dry, her eyes very bright beneath the darkness; she talked and talked with feverish volubility, and her voice faded into a long-drawn

murmur as Will's hearing weakened on the verge of unconsciousness.

'Why for d'you say you was wrong in what you done? Why d'you harp an' harp 'pon that, knawin' right well you'd do the same again to-morrow? You wasn't wrong, an' the Queen's self would say the same if she knawed. 'Twas to save a helpless woman you runned; an' her—Queen Victoria—wi' her big heart, as can sigh for the sorrow of even such small folks as us—she'd be the last to blame 'e.'

'She'll never knaw nothing 'bout it, gude or bad. They doan't vex her ears wi' trifles. I deserted, an' that's a crime.'

'I say 'tweern't no such thing. You had to choose between that an' letting me die. You saved my life; an' the facts would be judged the same by any as was wife an' mother, high or low. God A'mighty's best an' awnly judge how much you was wrong; an' you knaw He doan't blame 'e, else your heart would have been sore for it these years an' years. You never blamed yourself till now.'

'Ess, awften an' awften I did. It comed an' went, an' comed an' went again, like winter frosts. True as I'm living it comed an' went like that.'

Thus he spoke, half incoherently, his voice all blurred and vague with sleep.

'You awnly think 'twas so. You'd never have sat down under it else. It ban't meant you should give yourself up now, anyways. God would have sent the sojers to find 'e when you runned away if He'd wanted 'em to find 'e. You didn't hide. You looked the world in the faace bold as a lion, didn't 'e? Coourse you did; an' 'tis gwaine against God's will an' wish for you to give yourself up now. So you mustn't speak an' you must tell no one—not even faither. I was wrong to ax 'e to tell him. Nobody at all must knaw

Be dumb, an' trust me to be dumb. 'Tis buried an' forgot. I'll fight for 'e, my dearie, same as you've fought for me many a time; an' 'twill all fall out right for 'e, for men's come through worse passes than this wi' fewer friends than what you've got.'

She stopped to win breath and, in the silence, heard Will's regular respiration and knew that he slept. How much he had heard of her speech Phœbe could not say, but she felt glad to think that some hours at least of rest and peace now awaited him. For herself she had never been more widely awake, and her brains were very busy through the hours of darkness. A hundred thoughts and schemes presented themselves. She gradually eliminated everybody from the main issue but Will, John Grimbald, and herself; and, pursuing the argument, began to suspect that she alone had power to right this wrong. In one direction only could such an opinion lead—a direction tremendous to her. Yet she did not shrink from the necessity ahead; she strung herself up to face it; she longed for an opportunity and resolved to make one at the earliest moment.

Now that night was the longest in the whole year; and yet to Phœbe it passed with magic celerity.

Will awakened about half-past five, rose immediately according to his custom, lighted a candle and started to dress himself. He began the day in splendid spirits, begotten of good sleep and good health; but his wife saw the lightness of heart, the bustling activity of body, sink into apathy and inertia as remembrance overtook his wakening hour. It was like a brief and splendid dawn crushed by storm clouds at the very rise of the sun.

Phœbe presently dressed her little daughter and, as soon as the child had gone downstairs, Will resumed the problems of his position.

‘I be in two minds this marnin’,’ he said. ‘I’ve a thought to tell mother of this matter. She ’m that wise. I’ve knawed her put me on the right track ’fore now, an’ never guess she’d done it. Not but what I allus awn up to taking advice, if I follow it, an’ no man’s readier to profit by the wisdom of his betters than me. That’s how I’ve done all I have done in my time. T’other thought was to take your counsel an’ see Miller ’pon it.’

‘I was wrong, Will—quite wrong. I’ve been thinking tu. He mustn’t knaw, nor yet mother, nor nobody. Quite enough knaws as ’tis.

‘What’s the wisdom o’ talkin’ like that? Who’s gwaine to hide the thing even if they wanted to? God knaws I ban’t. I’d like, so well as not, to go up Chagford next market-day an’ shout out the business afore the world.’

‘You can’t now. You must wait. You promised. I thought about it with every inch of my brain last night, an’ I got a sort of feeling. I caan’t explain, but wait. I’ve trusted you all my life long an’ allus shall; now ’tis your turn to trust me, just this wance. I’ve got great thoughts. I see the way; I may do much myself. You see, Jan Grimb—’

Will stood still with his chin half shorn.

‘You dare to do that,’ he said, ‘an’ I’ll raise Cain in this plaace; I’ll—’

He broke off and laughed at himself.

‘Here be I blusterin’ like a gert bully, now! Doan’t be feared, Phoebe. Forgive my noise. You mean so well, but you caan’t hide your secrets fortunately. Bless your purty eyes—tu gude for me, an’ allus was, braave li’l woman! But no more of that—no seekin’ him, an’ no speech with him, if that’s the way your poor, silly thought was. My bones smart to think of you bearin’ any of it. But doan’t you put no oar into this

troubled water, else the bwoat 'll capsize, sure as death. I've promised 'e not to say a word till arter New Year; now you must promise me never, so help you, to speak to that man, or look at un, or listen to a word from un. Fly him like you would the devil; an' a gude second to the devil he is—if 'tis awnly in the matter o' patience. Promise now.'

'You're so hasty, Will. You doan't onderstand a woman's cleverness in such matters. 'Tis just the fashion thing as shaws what we'm made of.'

'Promise!' he thundered angrily. 'Now this instant moment, in wan word.'

She gave him a single defiant glance. Then the boldness of her eyes faded and her lips drooped at the corners.

'I promise then.'

'I should think you did.'

A few minutes later Will was gone, and Phœbe dabbed her moist eyes and blamed herself for so clumsily revealing her great intention: to see John Grimbald and plead with him. This secret ambition was now swept away, and she knew not where to turn or how to act for her husband.

CHAPTER XII

NEW YEAR'S EVE AND NEW YEAR'S DAY

FROM this point in his career Will Blanchard, who lacked all power of hiding his inner heart, soon made it superficially apparent that new troubles had overtaken him. No word concerning his intolerable anxieties escaped him, but a great cloud of tribulation encompassed every hour, and was revealed to

others by increased petulance and shortness of temper. This mental friction quickly appeared on the young man's face, and his habitual expression of sulkiness which formerly belied him, now increased and more nearly reflected the reigning temperament of Blanchard's mind. His nerves were on the rack and he grew sullen and fretful. A dreary expression gained upon his features, an expression sad as a winter twilight brushed with rain. To Phœbe he seldom spoke of the matter, and she soon abandoned further attempts to intrude upon his heart though her own was breaking for him. Billy Blee and the farm hands were Will's safety-valve. One moment he showered hard and bitter words; the next, at sight of some ploughboy's tears or older man's reasonable anger, Will instantly relented and expressed his sorrow. The dullest among them grew in time to discern matters were amiss with him, for his tormented mind began to affect his actions and disorder the progress of his life. At times he worked laboriously and did much with his own hands that might have been left to others; but his energy was displayed in a manner fitful and spasmodic; occasionally he would vanish altogether for four-and-twenty hours or more; and none knew when he might appear or disappear.

It happened on New Year's Eve that a varied company assembled at the 'Green Man' according to ancient custom. Here were Inspector Chown, Mr. Chapple, Mr. Blee, Charles Coomstock, with many others; and the assembly was further enriched by the presence of the bell-ringers. Their services would be demanded presently to toll out the old year, to welcome with joyful peal the new; and they assembled here until closing-time that they might enjoy a pint of the extra strong liquor a prosperous publican provided for his customers at this season.

The talk was of Blanchard, and Mr. Blee, provided

with a theme which always challenged his most forcible diction, discussed Will freely and without prejudice.

'I 'most goes in fear of my life, I tell 'e ; but thank God, 'tis the beginning of the end. He'll spread his wings afore spring an' be off again, or I doan't knaw un. Ess fay, he'll depart wi' his fiery nature an' horrible ideas 'pon manuring of land ; an' a gude riddance for Monks Barton, I say.'

'Mazing 'tis,' declared Mr. Coomstock, 'that he should look so black all times seeing the gude fortune as turns up for un when most he wants it.'

'So 'tis,' admitted Billy. 'The faace of un weer allus sulky, like to the faace of a auld ram cat, as may have a gude heart in un for all his glowerin' eyes. But him ! Theer ban't no pleasin' un. What do he want ? Surely never no man's falled on his feet awftener.'

'Tis that's what's spoilin' un, I reckon,' said Mr. Chapple. 'A li'l ill fortune he wants now, same as a salad o' green stuff wants some bite to it. He'd grumble in heaven by the looks of un. An' yet it do shaw the patience of God wi' human sawls.'

'Ess, it do,' answered Mr. Blee ; 'but patience ban't a virtue pushed tu far. Justice is justice, as I've said more'n wance to Miller an' Blanchard tu, an' a man of my years can see wheer justice lies so clear as God can. For why ? Because theer ban't room for two opinions. I've give my Maker best scores an' scores o' times, as we all must ; but truth caan't alter, an' having put thinking paarts into our heads, 'tis more'n God A'mighty's Self can do to keep us from usin' of 'em.'

'A tremenjous thought,' said Mr. Chapple.

'So 'tis. An' what I want to knaw is why should Blanchard have his fling, an' treat me like dirt, an' ride rough-shod awver his betters, an' scowl at the sky all times, an' nothin' said ?'

'Providence doan't answer a question just 'cause

we'm pleased to ax wan,' said Abraham Chown. 'What happens happens, because 'tis fore-ordained, an' you caan't judge the right an' wrong of a man's life from wan year or two or ten, more'n you can judge a glass o' ale by a tea-spoon of it. Many has a long rope awnly to hang themselves in the end by the wonnerful foresight of God.'

'All the same, theer'd be Hell an' Tommy to pay mighty quick, if you an' me did the things that bwoy does, an' carried on that onreligious,' replied Mr. Blee, with gloomy conviction. 'Ban't fair to other people, an' if 'twas Doomsday I'd up an' say so. What gude deeds have he done to have life smoothed out, an' the hills levelled an' the valleys filled up? An' nought but sour looks for it.'

'But be you sure he'm happy?' inquired Mr. Chapple. 'He'm not the man to walk 'bout wi' a fiddle-faace if 'twas fair weather wi' un. He've got his troubles same as us, depend upon it.'

Blanchard himself entered at this moment. It wanted but half an hour to closing-time when he did so, and he glanced round the bar, snorted at the thick atmosphere of alcohol and smoke, then pulled out his pipe and took a vacant chair.

'Gude evenin', Will,' said Mr. Chapple.

'A happy New Year, Blanchard,' added the landlord.

'Evening, sawls all,' answered Will, nodding round him. 'Auld year's like to die o' frost by the looks of it—a stinger, I tell 'e. Anybody seen Farmer Endicott? I've been looking for un since noon wi' a message from my faither-in-law.'

'I gived thicky message this marnin',' cried Billy.

'Ess, I knaw you did; that's my trouble. You gived it wrong. I'll just have a pint of the treble X then. 'Tis the night for 't.'

Will's demeanour belied the recent conversation respecting him. He appeared to be in great spirits, joked with the men, exchanged shafts with Billy, and was the first to roar with laughter when Mr. Blee got the better of him in a brisk battle of repartee. Truth to tell, the young man's heart felt somewhat lighter, and with reason. To-morrow his promise to Phoebe held him no longer, and his carking, maddening trial of patience was to end. The load would drop from his shoulders at daylight: his letter to Mr. Lyddon had been written. In the morning the Miller must read it before breakfast, and learn that his son-in-law had started for Plymouth to give himself up for the crime of the past. John Grimbald had made no sign and the act of surrender would now be voluntary—a thought which lightened Blanchard's heart and induced a turn of temper almost jovial. He joined a chorus, laughed with the loudest, and contrived before closing-time to drink a pint and a half of the famous special brew. Then the bell-ringers departed to their duties, and Mr. Chapple with Mr. Blee, Will, and one or two other favoured spirits spent a further half-hour in their host's private parlour, and there consumed a little sloe-gin, to steady the humming ale.

'You an' me must see wan another home,' said Will, when he and Mr. Blee departed into the frosty night.

'Fust time as ever you give me an arm,' murmured Billy.

'Won't be the last, I'm sure,' declared Will.

'I've allus had a gude word for 'e ever since I knawed 'e,' answered Billy.

'An' why for shouldn't 'e?' asked Will.

'Beginning of New Year's a solemn sarcumstance,' proceeded Billy, as a solitary bell began to toll. 'Theer's the death-rattle of eighteen hundred an'

eighty-six! Well, well, we must all die—men an' mice.'

'An' the devil take the hindmost.'

Mr. Blee chuckled.

'Let's go round this way,' he said.

'Why? Ban't your auld bones ready for bed yet? Theer's nought theer but starlight an' frost.'

'Be gormed to the frost, I laugh at it. Ban't that. 'Tis the Union workhouse, wheer auld Lezzard lies. I likes to pass, an' nod to un as he sits on the lew side o' the wall in his white coat chumping his thoughts between his gums.'

'He'm happier'n me or you, I lay.'

'Not him! You should see un glower 'pon me when I gives un "gude day." I tawld un wance as the Poor-rates was up somethin' cruel since he'd gone in the House, an' he looked as though he'd a liked to do me violence. No, he ban't happy, I warn 'e.'

'Well, you won't see un sitting under the stars in his white coat, poor auld blid. He'm asleep under the blankets, I lay.'

'Thin wans! Thin blankets an' not many of 'em. An' all his awn doin'. Patent justice if ever I seed it.'

'Tramp along! You can travel faster'n that. Ess fay! Justice is the battle-cry o' God against men most times. Maybe they'm strong on it in heaven, but theer's damned little filters down here. Theer go the bells! Another New Year come. Years o' the Lard they call 'em! Years o' the devil most times if you ax me? What do 'e want the New Year to bring to you, Billy?'

'A contented 'eart,' said Mr. Blee, 'an' perhaps just half-a-crown more a week if 'twas seemly. Brains be paid higher'n sweat in this world, an' I'm mostly brain now in my dealin's wi' Miller. A brain be like a nut, as ripens all the year through an' awnly comes

to be gude for gathering when the tree's in the sere. 'Tis in the autumn of life a man's brain be worth plucking like—eh?'

'Doan't knaw. They'm maggoty mostly at your age!'

'An' they'm milky mostly at yourn!'

'Listen to the bells an' give awver chattering,' said Will.

'After gude store o' drinks, a sad thing like holy bells ringing in the dark afar off do sting my nose an' bring a drop to my eye,' confessed Mr. Blee. 'An' you—why theer's a baaby hid away in the New Year for you—a human creature as may do gert wonders in the land an' turn out into Anti-Christ for all you can say positive. Theer's a braave thought for 'e!'

This remark sobered Blanchard and his mind travelled into the future, to Phœbe, to the child coming in June.

Billy babbled on, and presently they reached Mrs. Blanchard's cottage. Damaris herself, with a shawl over her head, stood and listened to the bells, and Will, taking leave of Mr. Blee, hastened to wish his mother all happiness in the year now newly dawned. He walked once or twice up and down the little garden beside her, and with a tongue loosened by liquor came near to telling her of his approaching action, but did not do so. Meantime Mr. Blee steered himself with all caution over Rushford Bridge to Monks Barton.

Presently the veteran appeared before his master and Phœbe, who had waited for the advent of the new year before retiring. Miller Lyddon was about to suggest a nightcap for Billy, but changed his mind.

'Enough's as gude as a feast,' he said. 'Canst get upstairs wi'out help?'

'Coourse I can! But the chap to the "Green

Man's" that perfuse wi' his liquor at seasons of rejoicing. More went down than was chalked up; I allow that. If you'll light my chamber cannel, I'll thank 'e, missis; an' a Happy New Year to all.'

Phœbe obeyed, launched Mr. Blee in the direction of his chamber, then turned to receive Will's caress as he came home and locked the door behind him.

The night air still carried the music of the bells. For an hour they pealed on; then the chime died slowly, a bell at a time, until two clanged each against the other. Presently one stopped and the last, weakening softly, beat a few strokes more, then ceased to fret the frosty birth-hour of another year.

The darkness slipped away, and Blanchard, who had long learned to rise without awakening his wife, was up and dressed again soon after five o'clock. He descended silently, placed a letter on the mantelpiece in the kitchen, abstracted a leg of goose and a hunch of bread from the larder, then set out upon a chilly walk of five miles to Moreton Hampstead. From there he designed to take train and proceed to Plymouth as directly and speedily as possible.

Some two hours later Will's letter found itself in Mr. Lyddon's hand, and his father-in-law learned the secret. Phœbe was almost as amazed as the Miller himself when this knowledge came to her ear; for Will had not breathed his intention to her, and no suspicion had crossed his wife's mind that he intended to act with such instant promptitude on the expiration of their contract.

'I doubted I knawed him through an' through at last, but 'tis awnly to-day, an' after this, that I can say as I do,' mused Mr. Lyddon over an untasted breakfast. 'To think he runned them awful risks to make you fast to him! To think he comed all across England in the

past to make you his wife against the danger on wan side, an' the power o' Jan Grimbald an' me drawed up 'pon the other!'

Pursuing this strain to Phoebe's heartfelt relief, the Miller neither assumed an attitude of great indignation at Will's action, nor affected despair of his future. He was much bewildered, however.

'He'll keep me 'mazed so long as I live, 'pears to me. But he'm gone for the present, an' I doan't say I'm sorry, knawin' what was behind. No call for you to sob yourself into a fever. Please God he'll be back-long 'fore you want him. Us'll make the least we can of it, an' bide patient until we hear tell of him. He've gone to Plymouth—that's all Chagford needs to knaw at present.'

'Theer's newspapers an' Jan Grimbald,' sobbed Phoebe.

'A dark man wi' fixed purposes, sure enough,' admitted her father, for Will's long letter had placed all the facts before him. 'What he'll do us caan't say, though seein' Will's act, theer's nothin' more left for un. Why has the man been silent so long if he meant to strike in the end? Now I must go an' tell Mrs. Blanchard. Will begs an' prays of me to do that so soon as he shall be gone; an' he'm right. She ought to knaw; but 'tis a job calling for careful choice of words an' a light hand. Wonder is to me he didn't tell her hisself. But he never does what you'd count 'pon his doing.'

'You won't tell Billy, faither, will 'e? Ban't no call for that.'

'I won't tell him, certainly not; but Blee's a ferret when a thing's hid. A detective mind theer is to Billy. How would it do to tell un right away an' put un 'pon his honour to say nothing?'

'He mustn't knaw; he mustn't knaw. He couldn't

keep a secret like that if you gived un fifty pounds to keep it. So soon tell a town-crier as him.'

'Then us won't,' promised Mr. Lyddon, and ten minutes after he proceeded to Mrs. Blanchard's cottage with the news. His first hasty survey of the position had not been wholly unfavourable to Will, but he was a man of unstable mind in his estimates of human character, and now he chiefly occupied his thoughts with the offence of desertion from the army. The disgrace of such an action magnified itself as he reflected upon Will's unhappy deed.

Phœbe meantime succumbed and found herself a helpless prey of terrors vague and innumerable. Will's fate she could not guess at; but she felt it must be severe; she doubted not that his sentence would extend over long years. In her dejection and misery she mourned for herself and wondered what manner of babe would this be that now took substance through a season of such gloom and accumulated sorrows. The thought begat pity for the coming little one—utmost commiseration that set Phœbe's tears flowing anew—and when the Miller returned he found his daughter stricken beyond measure and incoherent under her grief. But Mr. Lyddon came back with a companion, and it was her husband, not her father, who dried Phœbe's eyes and cheered her lonely heart. Will indeed appeared and stood by her suddenly: and she heard his voice and cried a loud thanksgiving and clasped him close.

Yet no occasion for rejoicing had brought about this unexpected reappearance. Indeed more ill fortune was responsible for it. When Mr. Lyddon arrived at Mrs. Blanchard's gate, he found both Will and Doctor Parsons standing there; then learned the incident that had prevented his son-in-law's proposed action.

Passing that way himself some hours earlier, Will

had been suddenly surprised to see blue smoke rising from a chimney of the house. It was a very considerable time before such event might reasonably be expected, and a second look alarmed Blanchard's heart, for on the little chimney-stack he knew each pot, and it was not the kitchen chimney but that of his mother's bedroom which now sent evidence of a newly-lighted fire into the morning.

In a second Will's plans and purposes were swept away before this spectacle. A fire in a bedroom represented a circumstance almost outside his experience. At least it indicated sickness unto death. He was in the house a moment later, for the latch lifted at his touch; and when he knocked at his mother's door and cried his name, she bade him come in.

'What's this? What's amiss with 'e, mother? Doan't say 'tis anything very bad. I seed the smoke an' my heart stood still.'

She smiled and assured him her illness was of no account.

'Ban't nothing. Just a shivering an' stabbing in the chest. My awn fulishness to be out listening to they bells in the frost. But no call to fear. I awnly axed my li'l servant to get me a cup o' tea, an' she comed an' would light the fire, an' would go for doctor, though theer ban't no 'casion at all.'

'Every occasion, an' the gal was right, an' it shawed gude sense in such a dinky maid as her. Nothin' like taaking a cold in gude time. Do 'e catch heat from the fire?'

Mrs. Blanchard's eyes were dull, and her breathing a little disordered. Will instantly began to bustle about. He added fuel to the flame, set on a kettle, dragged blankets out of cupboards and piled them upon his mother. Then he found a pillow-case, aired

it until the thing scorched, inserted a pillow, and placed it beneath the patient's head. His subsequent step was to rummage dried marsh-mallows out of a drawer, concoct a sort of dismal brew, and inflict half a cup upon the sick woman. Doctor Parsons still tarrying, Will went out of doors, knocked a brick from the fowl-house wall, brought it in, made it nearly red hot, then wrapped it up in an old rug and applied it to his parent's feet. All of which things the sick woman patiently endured.

'You'm doin' me a power o' gude, dearie,' she said, as her discomfort and suffering increased.

Presently Doctor Parsons arrived, checked Will in fantastic experiments with a poultice, and gave him occupation in a commission to the physician's surgery. When he returned, he heard that his mother was suffering from a severe chill, but that any definite declaration upon the case was as yet impossible.

'No cause to be 'feared?' he asked.

''Tis idle to be too sanguine. You know my philosophy. I've seen a scratched finger kill a man; I've known puny babes wriggle out of Death's hand when I could have sworn it had closed upon them for good and all. Where there's life there's hope.'

'Ess, I knaw you,' answered Will gloomily; 'an' I knaw when you say that you allus mean there ban't no hope at all.'

'No, no. A strong, hale woman like your mother need not give us any fear at present. Sleep and rest, cheerful faces round her, and no amateur physic. I'll see her to-night and send in a nurse from the Cottage Hospital at once.'

Then it was that Miller Lyddon arrived, and presently Will returned home. He wholly mistook Phœbe's frantic reception, and assumed that her tears must be flowing for Mrs. Blanchard.

'She'll weather it,' he said. 'Keep a gude heart. The gal from the hospital ban't coming 'cause theer's danger, but 'cause she'm smart an' vitty 'bout a sick-room, an' cheerful as a canary an' knaws her business. Quick of hand an' light of foot for sartin. Mother'll be all right; I feel it deep in me she will.'

Presently conversation passed to Will himself, and Phoebe expressed a hope this sad event would turn him from his determination for some time at least.

'What determination?' he asked. 'What be talkin' about?'

'The letter you left for faither, and the thing you started to do,' she answered.

'Struth! So I did; an' if the sight o' the smoke an' then hearin' o' mother's trouble didn't blaw the whole business out of my brain!'

He stood amazed at his own complete forgetfulness.

'Queer to be sure! But coourse theer weern't room in my mind for anything but mother arter I seed her stricken down.'

During the evening, after final reports from Mrs. Blanchard's sickroom spoke of soothing sleep, Miller Lyddon sent Billy upon an errand, and discussed Will's position.

'Jan Grimbals waited so long,' he said, 'that maybe he'll wait longer still an' end by doin' nothin' at all.'

'Not him! You judge the man by yourself,' declared Will. 'But he's made of very different metal. I lay he's bidin' till the edge of this be sharp, and sure to cut deepest. So like's not when he hears tell mother's took bad, he'll choose that instant moment to have me marched away.'

There was a moment's silence, then Blanchard burst out into a fury bred of sudden thought, and struck the table heavily with his fist.

'God blast it! I be allus waitin' now for some wan's vengeance! I caan't stand this life no more. I caan't an' I won't—'tis enough to soften any man's wits.'

'Quiet! quiet, caan't 'e?' said the Miller, as though he told a dog to lie down. 'Theer now! You've been an' gived me palpitations with your noise. Bang-ing tables won't mend it, nor bad words neither. This thing hasn't come by chance. You'm ripening in mind an' larnin' every day. You mark my word; theer's a mort o' matters to pick out of this new trouble. An' fust, patience.'

'Patience! If a patient, long-suffering man walks this airth, I be him, I should reckon. I caan't wait the gude pleasure of that dog, not even for you, Miller.'

'Tis discipline an' sent for the strengthening of your fibre. Providence barred the road to-day, else you'd be in prison now. Ban't meant you should give yourself up—that's how I read it.'

'Tis cowardly waitin' an' playin' into his hands; an' if you awnly knawed how this has fouled my mind wi' evil, an' soured the very taste of what I eat, an' dulled the faace of life, an' blunted the right feeling in me even for them I love best, you'd never bid me bide on under it. 'Tis rotting me—body an' sawl—that's what 'tis doin'. An' now I be come to such a pass that if I met un to-morrow an' he swore on his dying oath he'd never tell, I shouldn't be contented even wi' that.'

'No such gude fortune,' sighed Phœbe.

'Twouldn't be gude fortune,' answered her husband. 'I'm like a dirty chamber coated wi' cobwebs an' them ghostly auld spiders as hangs dead in unscoured corners. Plaaces so left gets worse. My mind's all in a filthy ferment an' 'twouldn't be none the better now if Jan Grimbald broke his damned neck to-morrow

an' took my secret with him. I caan't breathe for it; it's suffocating me.'

Phoebe used subtlety in her answer, and invited him to view the position from her standpoint rather than his own.

'Think o' me then, an' t' others. 'Tis plain selfishness this talk, if you looks to the bottom of it.'

'As to that, I doan't say so,' began Mr. Lyddon, slowly stuffing his pipe. 'No. When a man goes so deep into his heart as what Will have before me this minute, doan't become no man to judge un or tell 'bout selfishness. Us have got to save our awn sawls, an' us must even leave wife, an' mother, and childer if theer's no other way to do it. Ban't no right living—ban't no fair travelling in double harness wi' conscience, onless you've got a clean mind. An' yet waitin' 'pears the only way o' wisdom just here. You've never got room in that head o' yourn for more'n wan thought to a time; an' I doan't blame 'e theer neither, for a chap wi' wan idea, if he sticks to it, goes further'n him as drives a team of thoughts half broken in. I mean you'm forgettin' your mother for the moment. I should say, "wait for her mending 'fore you do anything.'"

Back came Blanchard's mind to his mother with a whole-hearted swing.

'Ess,' he said, 'you'm right theer. My plaace is handy to her till she'm movin'; an' if he tries to take me before she'm down-house again, by God I'll——!'

'Let it bide that way then. Put t' other matter out o' your mind so far as you can. Fill your pipe an' suck deep at it. I haven't seen 'e smoke this longful time; an' in my view theer's no better servant than tobacco to a mind puzzled at wan o' life's cross-roads.'

CHAPTER XIII

MR. LYDDON'S TACTICS

IN the morning Mrs. Blanchard was worse, and some few days later lay in danger of her life. Her son spent half his time in the sickroom, walked about bootless to make no sound, and fretted with impatience at thought of the length of days which must elapse before Chris could return to Chagford. Telegrams had been sent to Martin Grimbald, who was spending his honeymoon out of England; but on the most sanguine computation he and his wife would scarcely be home again in less than ten days or a fortnight.

Hope and gloom succeeded each other swiftly within Will Blanchard's mind, and at first he discounted the consistent pessimism of Doctor Parsons somewhat more liberally than the issue justified. When, therefore, he was informed of the truth and stood face to face with his mother's danger, hope sank, and his unstable spirit was swept from an altitude of secret confidence to the opposite depth of despair.

Through long silences, while she slept or seemed to do so, the young man traced back his life and hers; and he began to see what a good mother means. Then he accused himself of many faults and made impetuous confession to his wife and her father. On these occasions Phoebe softened his self-blame, but Mr. Lyddon let Will talk, and told him for his consolation that every mother's son must be accused of like offences.

'Best of childer falls far short,' he assured Will; 'best brings tu many tears, if 'tis awnly for wantonness; an' him as thinks he've been all he should be to a

mother lies to himself; an' him as says he has, lies to other people.'

Will's wild-hawk nature was subdued before this grave crisis in his parent's life; he sat through long nights and tended the fire with quiet fingers; he learned from the nurse how to move a pillow tenderly, how to shut a door without any sound. He wearied Doctor Parsons with futile propositions, but the physician's simulated cynicism often broke down in secret before this spectacle of the son's dog-like pertinacity. Blanchard much desired to have a vein opened for his mother, nor was all the practitioner's eloquence equal to convincing him such a course could not be pursued.

'She'm gone that gashly white along o' want o' blood,' declared Will; 'an' I be busting wi' gude red blood, an' why for shouldn't you put in a pipe an' draw off a quart or so for her betterment? I'll swear 'twould strengthen the heart of her.'

Time passed, and it happened on one occasion, while walking abroad between his vigils, that Blanchard met John Grimbal. Will had reflected curiously of late days into what ghostly proportions his affair with the master of the Red House now dwindled before this greater calamity of his mother's sickness; but sudden sight of the enemy roused passion and threw back the man's mind to that occasion of their last conversation in the woods.

Yet the first words that now passed were to John Grimbal's credit. He made an astonishing and unexpected utterance. Indeed the spoken word surprised him as much as his listener, and he swore at himself for a fool when Will's retort reached his ear.

They were passing at close quarters—Blanchard on foot, John upon horseback, when the latter said—

'How's Mrs. Blanchard to-day?'

'Mind your awn business an' keep our name off

your lips!' answered the pedestrian, who misunderstood the question, as he did most questions where possible, and now supposed that Grimal meant Phoebe.

His harsh words woke instant wrath.

'What a snarling, cross-bred cur you are! I should judge your own family will be the first to thank me for putting you under lock and key. Hell to live with, you must be.'

'God rot your dirty heart! Do it—do it; doan't jaw—do it! But if you lay a finger 'pon me while my mother's bad or have me took before she'm stirring again, I'll kill you when I come out. God's my judge if I doan't!'

Then, forgetting what had taken him out of doors, and upon what matter he was engaged, Will turned back in a tempest, and hastened to his mother's cottage.

At Monks Barton Mr. Lyddon and his daughter had many and long conversations upon the subject of Blanchard's difficulties. Both trembled to think what might be the issue if his mother died; both began to realise that there could be no more happiness for Will until a definite extrication from his present position was forthcoming. At his daughter's entreaty the Miller finally determined on a strong step. He made up his mind to visit Grimal at the Red House, and win from him, if possible, some undertaking which would enable him to relieve his son-in-law of the present uncertainty.

Phoebe pleaded for silence, and prayed her father to get a promise at any cost in that direction.

'Let him awnly promise 'e never to tell of his free will, an' the door against danger's shut,' she said. 'When Will knaws Grimal's gwaine to be dumb, he'll rage awhile, then calm down an' be hisself again. 'Tis the doubt that's drove him frantic.'

‘I’ll see the man, then ; but not a word to Will’s ear. All the fat would be in the fire if he so much as dreamed I was about any such business. As to a promise, if I can get it I will. An’ twixt me an’ you, Phœbe, I’m hopeful of it. He’s kept quiet so long that theer caan’t be any fiery hunger ’gainst Will in un just now. I’ll soothe un down an’ get his word of honour if it’s to be got. Then your husband can do as he pleases.’

‘Leave the rest to me, faither.’

A fortnight later the cautious Miller, after great and exhaustive reflection, set out to carry into practice his intention. An appointment was made on the day that Will drove to Moreton to meet his sister and Martin Grimbald. This removed him out of the way, while Billy had been despatched to Okehampton for some harness, and Mr. Lyddon’s daughter, alone in the secret, was spending the afternoon with her mother-in-law.

So Miller walked over to the Red House and soon found himself waiting for John Grimbald in a cheerless but handsome dining-room. The apartment suggested little occupation. A desk stood in the window, and upon it were half a dozen documents under a paper-weight made from a horse’s hoof. A fire burned in the broad grate, a row of chairs, upholstered in dark red leather, stood stiffly round ; a dozen indifferent oil-paintings of dogs and horses filled large gold frames upon the walls ; and upon a massive sideboard of black oak a few silver cups, won by Grimbald’s dogs at various shows and coursing meetings, were displayed.

Mr. Lyddon found himself kept waiting about ten minutes ; then John entered, bade him a cold ‘good afternoon’ without shaking hands, and placed an easy-chair for him beside the fire.

'Would you object to me lighting my pipe, Jan Grimal?' asked the Miller humbly; and by way of answer the other took a box of matches from his pocket and handed it to the visitor.

'Thank you, thank you; I'm obliged to you. Let me get alight, then I'll talk to 'e.'

He puffed for a minute or two, while Grimal waited in silence for his guest to begin.

'Now, wi'out any beatin' of the bush or waste of time, I'll speak. I be come 'bout Blanchard, as I dare say you guessed. The news of what he done nine or ten years ago comed to me just a month since. A month 'twas or might be three weeks. Like a bolt from the blue it falled 'pon me, an' that's a fact. An' I heard how you knawed the thing—you, as had such gude cause to hate un wance.'

'“Once”?’

'Well, no man's hate can outlive his reason surely? I was with 'e tu, then; but the man what lets himself suffer lifelong trouble from a fule, be a fule himself. Not that Blanchard's all fule—far from it. He've ripened a little of late years—though slowly as fruit in a wet summer. Granted he bested you in the past an' your natural hope an' prayer was to be upsides wi' un some day. Well, that's all dead an' buried, ban't it? I hated the shadow of un in them days so bad as ever you did; but you gets to see more of the world, an' the men that walks in it when you'm moved away from things by the distance of a few years. Then you find how wan deed bears upon t'other. Will done no more than you'd a done if the cases was altered. In fact you'm alike at some points, come to think of it.'

'Is that what you've walked over here to tell me?'

'No; I'm here to ax 'e frank an' plain, as a sportsman an' a straight man wi' a gude heart most times, to tell

me what you'm gwaine to do 'bout this job. I'm auld, an' I assure 'e you'll hate yourself if you give un up. 'Twould be outside your carater to do it.'

'You say that! Would you harbour a convict from Princetown if you found him hiding on your farm?'

'Ban't a like case. Theer's the personal point of view, if you onderstand me. A man deserts from the army ten years ago, an' you, as a sort o' amateur soldier, feels 'tis your duty to give un to justice.'

'Well, isn't that what has happened?'

'No fay! Nothing of the sort. If 'twas your duty, why didn't you do it fust minute you found it out? If you'd writ to the authorities an' gived the man up fust moment, I might have said 'twas a hard deed, but I'd never have dared to say 'tween't just. Awnly you done no such thing. You nursed the power an' sucked the thought, same as furriners suck at poppy poison. You played wi' the picture of revenge against a man you hated, an' let the idea of what you'd do fill your brain; an' then, when you wanted bigger doses, you told Phœbe what you knawed—reckoning as she'd tell Will bimebye. That's bad, Jan Grimbald—worse than poisoning foxes, by God! An' you knaw it.'

'Who are you to judge me and my motives?'

'An auld man, an' wan as be deeply interested in this business. Time was when we thought alike touching the bwoy; now we doan't; 'cause your knawledge of un hasn't grawed past the point wheer he downed us; an' mine has.'

'You're a fool to say so. D'you think I haven't watched the young brute these many years? Self-sufficient, ignorant, hot-headed, always in the wrong. What d'you find to praise in the clown? Look at his life. Failure! failure! failure and making of enemies at every turn. Where would he be to-day but for you?'

'Theer's a rare gert singleness of purpose 'bout un.'

'A grand success he is, no doubt. I suppose you couldn't get on without him now. Yet you cursed the cub freely enough once.'

'Bitter speeches won't serve 'e, Grimbald; but they show me mighty clear what's hid in you. Your sawl's torn every way by this thing, an' you turn an' turn again to it, like a dog to his vomit. Yet the gude in 'e drags 'e away.'

'Better cut all that. You won't tell me what you've come for, so I'll tell you. You want me to promise not to move in this matter, is that so?'

'Why, not ezackly. I want more'n that. I never thought for a minute you would do it, now you've let the time pass so far. I knaw you'll never act so ugly a paart now; but Will doan't, an' he'll never b'lieve me if I told un.'

The other made a sound, half growl, half mirthless laugh.

'You've taken it all for granted, then—you, who know more about what's in my mind than I do myself? You're a fond old man; and if you'd wanted to screw me up to the pitch of taking the necessary trouble, you couldn't have gone a better way. I've been too busy to bother about the young rascal of late or he'd lie in gaol now.'

'Doan't say no such vain things! D'you think I caan't read what your faace speaks so plain? A man's eyes tell the truth awftener than what his tongue does, for they'm harder to break into lying. "Tu busy"! You be foul to the very brain-pan wi' this job, an' you knaw it.'

'Is the hatred all on my side, d'you suppose? Curse the brute to hell! And you'd have me eat humble-pie to the man who's wrecked my life?'

‘No such thing at all. All the hatred be on your side. He’d forgived ’e clean. Even now, though you’m fretting his guts to fiddlestrings because of waiting for ’e, he feels no malice—no more than the caged rat feels ’gainst the man as be carrying him, anyway.’

‘You’re wrong there. He’d kill me to-morrow. He let me know it. In a weak moment I asked him the other day how his mother was; and he turned upon me like a mad dog, and told me to keep his name off my lips, and said he’d have my life if I gave him up.’

‘That’s coorious then, for he’s hungry to give himself up, so soon as the auld woman’s well again.’

‘Talk! I suppose he sent you to whine for him?’

‘Not so. He’d have blocked my road if he’d guessed.’

‘Well, I’m honest when I say I don’t care a curse what he does or does not. Let him go his way. And as to proclaiming him, I shall do so when it pleases me. An odious crime that. A traitor to his country.’

‘Doan’t become you nor me to dwell ’pon that, seeing how things was.’

Grimbal rose.

‘You think he’s a noble fellow and that your daughter had a merciful escape. It isn’t for me to suggest you are mistaken. Now I’ve no more time to spare, I’m afraid.’

The Miller also rose, and as he prepared to depart he spoke a final word.

‘You’m terrible pushed for time by the looks of it. I knaw ’tis hard in this life to find time to do right, though every man can make a ’mazing ’mort o’ leisure for t’other thing. But, hear me; you’m ruinin’ yourself body an’ sawl along o’ this job—body an’ sawl—like apples in a barrel rots each other. You’m in a bad way, Jan Grimbal, an’ I’m sorry for’e—brick house

an' horses an' dogs notwithstanding. Have a spring cleaning in that sulky brain o' yourn, my son, an' be a man wi' yourself, same as you be a man wi' the world.'

The other sneered.

'Don't get hot. The air is cold. And as you've given so much good advice, take some too. Mind your own business, and let your son-in-law mind his.'

Mr. Lyddon shook his head.

'Such words do only prove me right. Look in your heart an' see how 'tis with you that you can speak to an auld man so. 'Tis common metal shawing up in 'e, an' I'm sorry to find it.'

He set off home without more words and, as chance ordered the incident, emerged from the avenue gates of the Red House while a covered vehicle passed by on the way from Moreton Hampstead. Its roof was piled with luggage, and inside sat Chris, her husband, and Will. They spied Mr. Lyddon and made room for him; but later on in the evening Will taxed the Miller with his action.

'I knawed right well wheer you'd-come from,' he said gloomily, 'an' I'd a cut my right hand off rather than you should have done it. You'd didn't ought, faither; for I'll have no living man come between me an' him.'

'I made it clear I was on my awn paart,' explained Mr. Lyddon; but that night Will wrote a letter to his enemy and despatched it by a lad before breakfast on the following morning.

'Sir,' he said, 'this comes to say that Miller seen you yesterday out of his own head, and if I had knowed he was coming I would have took good care to prevent it.'

'W. BLANCHARD.'

CHAPTER XIV

ACTION

TIME passed, and Mrs. Blanchard made a slow return to health. Her daughter assumed control of the sick-room, and Martin Grimbald was denied the satisfaction of seeing Chris settled in her future home for a period of nearly two months. Then, when the invalid became sufficiently restored to leave Chagford for change of air, both Martin and Chris accompanied her and spent a few weeks by the sea.

Will, meantime, revolved upon his own affairs and suffered torments long drawn out. For these protracted troubles those of his own house were responsible, and both Phœbe and the Miller greatly erred in their treatment of him at this season. For the woman there were indeed excuses, but Mr. Lyddon might have been expected to show more wisdom and better knowledge of a character at all times transparent enough. Phœbe, nearing maternal tribulation, threw a new obstacle in her husband's way and implored him by all holy things, now that he had desisted from confession thus far, to keep his secret yet a little longer and wait for the birth of the child. She used every possible expedient to win this new undertaking from Will, and her father added his voice to hers. The Miller's expressed wish, strongly urged, frequently repeated, at last triumphed, and against his own desire and mental promptings, Blanchard, at terrible cost to himself, had promised patience until June.

Life, thus clouded and choked, wrought havoc with the man. His natural safety-valves were blocked, his nerves shattered, his temper poisoned. Primitive char-

acteristics appeared as a result of this position, and he exhibited the ferocity of an over-driven tame beast, or a hunted wild one. In days long removed from this crisis he looked back with chill of body and shudder of mind to that nightmare springtime; and he never willingly permitted even those dearest to him to retrace the period.

The struggle lasted long, but his nature beat Blanchard before the end, burst its bonds, shattered promises and undertakings, weakened marital love for a while and set him free by one tremendous explosion and victory of natural force. There had come into his head of late a new sensation, as of busy fingers weaving threads within his skull and iron hands moulding the matter of his brain into new patterns. The demon things responsible for his torment only slept when he slept, or when, as had happened once or twice, he drank himself indifferent to all mundane matters. Yet he could not still them for long, and even Phoebe had heard mutterings and threats of the thread-spinners who were driving her husband mad.

On an evening in late May she became seriously alarmed for his reason. Circumstances suddenly combined to strangle the last flickering breath of patience in Will, and the slender barriers were swept away in such a storm as even Phoebe's wide experience of him had never paralleled. Miller Lyddon was out, at a meeting in the village convened to determine after what fashion Chagford should celebrate the Sovereign's Jubilee; Billy also departed about private concerns, and Will and his wife had Monks Barton much to themselves. Even she irritated the suffering man at this season, and her sunken face and chatter about her own condition and future hopes of a son often worried him into sheer frenzy. His promise once exacted she rarely touched upon that matter, believing the less said

the better, but he misunderstood her reticence and held it selfish. Indeed Blanchard fretted and chafed alone now; for John Grimbal's sustained silence had long ago convinced Mr. Lyddon that the master of the Red House meant no active harm, and Phoebe readily grasped at the same conclusion.

This night, however, the floodgates crumbled, and Will, before a futile assertion from Phoebe touching the happy promise of the time to come and the cheerful spring weather, dashed down his pipe with an oath, clenched his hands, then leapt to his feet, shook his head, and strode about like a maniac.

'Will! You've brawk un to shivers—the butivul wood pipe wi' amber that I gived 'e last birthday!'

'Damn my birthday—a wisht day for me 'twas! I've lived tu long—tu long by all my years, an' nobody cares wan salt tear that I be roastin' in hell fire afore my time. I caan't stand it no more—no more at all—not for you or your faither or angels in heaven or ten million babies to be born into this blasted world—not if I was faither to 'em all. I must live my life free, or else I'll go in a madhouse. Free—do 'e hear me? I've suffered enough an' waited more 'n enough. Ban't months nor weeks neither—'tis a long, long lifetime. You talk o' time dragging! If you knawed—if you knawed! An' these devil-spinners allus knotting an' twisting. I could do things—I could—things man never dreamed. An' I will—for they'm grawing and grawing, an' they'll burst my skull if I let 'em bide in it. Months ago I've sat on a fence unbeknawnst wheer men was shooting and whistled for death. So help me, 'tis true. Me to do that! Theer's a cur for 'e; an' yet ban't me neither, but the spinners in my head. Death's a party easily called, mind you. A knife, or a pinch o' powder, or a drop o' deep water—they'll bring un to your elbow in a moment. Awnly, if I done

that, I'd go in company. Nobody should bide to laugh. Them as would cry might cry, but him as would laugh should come along o' me—he should, by God!

'Will, Will! It isn't my Will talking so?'

'Ess fay 'tis, an' I be in earnest at last, an' speakin' truth. The spinners knaw, an' they'm right. I'm sick to sheer hate o' my life; and you've helped to make me so—you an' your faither likewise. This thing doan't tear your heart out of you an' grind your nerves to pulp as it should do if you was a true wife.'

'Oh, my dear, my lovey, how can 'e say so or think it? You knaw what it has been to me.'

'I knaw you've thought all wrong 'pon it when you've thought at all. An' Miller tu. You've prevailed wi' me to go on livin' a coward's life for countless ages an' ages o' time—me—me—creepin' on the airth wi' my tail between my legs an' knawin' I never set eyes on a man as ban't braver than myself. An' him—Grimbal—laughing, like the devil he is, to think on what my life must be!'

'I caan't be no quicker. The cheel's movin' an' bracin' itself up an' makin' ready to come in the world, ban't it? I've told 'e so fifty times. It's little longer to wait.'

'It's no longer. It's nearer than sleep or food or drink. It's comin' 'fore the moon sets. 'Tis that or the madhouse—nothin' else. If you'd felt the fire as have been eatin' my thinking paarts o' late days, you'd knaw. Ban't no use your cryin', for 't isn't love of me makes you. Rivers o' tears doan't turn me no more. I'm steel now—fust time for a month—an' while I'm steel I'll act like steel an' strike like steel. I've had shaky nights an' silly nights an' haunted nights, but my head's clear for wance, an' I'll use it while 'tis.'

'Not to do no rash thing, Will? For Christ's sake you won't hurt yourself or any other?'

‘I must meet him wance for all.’

‘He ’m at the council ’bout Jubilee wi’ faither an’ parson an’ the rest.’

‘But he’ll go home arter. An’ I’ll have “Yes” or “No” to-night—I will, if I’ve got to shake the word out of his sawl. I ban’t gwaine to be driven lunatic for him or you or any. Death’s a sight better than a soft head an’ a lifetime o’ dirt an’ drivelling an’ babbling, like the brainless beasts they feed an’ fatten in asylums. That’s worse cruelty than any I be gwaine to suffer at human hands—to be mewed in wan of them gashly mad-holes wi’ the rack an’ ruins o’ empty flesh grinning an’ gibbering ’pon me from all the corners o’ the airth. I be sane now—sane enough to knaw I’m gwaine mad fast—an’ I won’t suffer it another hour. It’s come crying and howling upon my mind like a storm this night, an’ this night I’ll end it.’

‘Wait at least until the morning. See him then.’

‘Go to bed, an’ doan’t goad me to more waiting if you ever loved me. Get to bed—out of my sight. I’ve had enough of ’e and of all human things this many days. An’ that’s as near madness as I’m gwaine. What I do, I do to-night.’

She rose from her chair in sudden anger at his strange harshness, for the wife who has never heard an unkind word resents with passionate protest the sting of the first when it falls. Now genuine indignation inflamed Phoebe, and she spoke bitterly.

“‘Enough of me’! Ess fay! Like enough you have—a poor, patient creature sweatin’ for ’e, an’ thinkin’ for ’e, an’ blotting her eyes with tears for ’e, an’ bearin’ your childer an’ your troubles tu! “Enough of me.” Ess, I’ll get gone to my bed an’ stiffen my joints wi’ kneelin’ in prayer for ’e, an’ weary God’s ear for a fule!’

His answer was an action, and before she had done

speaking he stretched above him and took his gun from its place on an old beam that extended across the ceiling.

‘What in God’s name be that for? You wouldn’t——’

‘Shoot a fox? Why not? I’m a farmer now, and I’d kill best auld red Moor fox as ever gave a field forty minutes an’ beat it. You was whinin’ ’bout the chicks awnly this marnin’. I’ll sit under the wood-stack a bit an’ think ’fore I starts. Ban’t no gude gwaine yet.’

Will’s explanation of his deed was the true one, but Phoebe realised in some dim fashion that she stood within the shadow of a critical night and that action was called upon from her. Her anger waned a little, and her heart began to beat fast, but she acted with courage and promptitude.

‘Let un be to-night—auld fox, I mean. Theer’m more chicks than young foxes, come to think of it; an’ he’m awnly doin’ what you forget to do—fighting for his vixen an’ cubs.’

She looked straight into Will’s eyes, took the gun out of his hands, climbed on to a chair, and hung the weapon up again in its place.

He laughed curiously, and helped his wife to the ground again.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘Now go an’ do what you want to do, an’ doan’t forget the future happiness of women an’ childer lies upon it.’

Her anger was nearly gone, as he spoke again.

‘How little you onderstand me arter all these years—an’ never will—nobody never will but mother. What did ’e fear? That I’d draw trigger on the man from behind a tree p’raps?’

‘No—not that, but that you might be driven to kill yourself along o’ having such a bad wife.’

'Now we'm both on the mad road,' he said bitterly. Then he picked up his stick and, a moment later, went out into the night.

Phoebe watched his tall figure pass over the river, and saw him silhouetted against dead silver of moonlit waters as he crossed the stepping-stones. Then she climbed for the gun again, hid it, and presently prepared for her father's return.

'What butivul peace an' quiet theer be in ministerin' to a gude faither,' she thought, 'as compared wi' servin' a stormy husband!' Then sorrow changed to active fear, and that, in its turn, sank into a desolate weariness and indifference. She detected no semblance of justice in her husband's outburst; she failed to see how circumstances must sooner or late have precipitated his revolt; and she felt herself very cruelly misjudged, very gravely wronged.

Meantime Blanchard passed through a hurricane of rage against his enemy, much akin to that formerly recorded of John Grimbald himself, when the brute won to the top of him and he yearned for physical conflict. That night Will was resolved to get a definite response or come to some conclusion by force of arms. His thoughts carried him far, and before he took up his station within the grounds of the Red House, at a point from which the avenue approach might be controlled, he had already fallen into a frantic hunger for fight and a hope that his enemy would prove of like mind. He itched for assault and battery, and his heart clamoured to be clean in his breast again.

Whatever might happen, he was determined to give himself up on the following day. He had done all he could for those he loved, but he was powerless to suffer more. He longed now to trample his foe into the dust, and, that accomplished, he would depart, well satisfied, and receive what punishment was due. His

accumulated wrongs must be paid at last, and he fully determined, an hour before John Grimbald came home-wards, that the payment should be such as he himself had received long years before on Rushford Bridge. His muscles throbbed for action as he sat and waited at the top of the sloping bank dotted with hawthorns that extended upwards from the edge of the avenue and terminated on the fringe of young coverts.

And now, by a chance not uncommon, two separate series of circumstances were about to clash, while the shock engendered was destined to precipitate the climax of Will Blanchard's fortunes in so far as this record is concerned. On the night that he thus raged and suffered the gall bred of long inaction to overflow, John Grimbald likewise came to a sudden conclusion with himself, and committed a deed of nature definite so far as it went.

In connection with the approaching Jubilee rejoicings a spirit in some sense martial filled the air, and Grimbald with his yeomanry was destined to play a part. A transient comet-blaze of militarism often sparkles over fighting nations at any season of universal joy, and that more especially if the keystone of the land's constitution be a crown. This fire found material inflammable enough in the hearts of many Devonshire men, and before its warm impulse John Grimbald, inspired by a particular occasion, compounded with his soul at last. Rumoured on long tongues from the village alehouse, there had come to his ears the report of certain ill-considered utterances made by his enemy upon the events of the hour. They were only a hot-headed and very miserable man's foolish comments upon things in general and the approaching festival in particular, and they served but to illustrate the fact that no ill-educated and passionate soul can tolerate

universal rejoicings, itself wretched; but Grimbald clutched at this proven disloyalty of an old deserter, and told himself that personal questions must weigh with him no more.

‘The sort of discontented brute that drifts into Socialism and all manner of wickedness,’ he thought. ‘The rascal must be muzzled once for all, and as a friend to the community I shall act, not as an enemy to him.’

This conclusion he came to on the evening of the day which saw Blanchard’s final eruption, and he was amazed to find how straightforward and simple his course appeared when viewed from the impersonal standpoint of duty. His brother was due to dine with John Grimbald in half an hour, for both men were serving on a committee to meet that night upon the question of the local celebrations at Chagford, and they were going together. Time, however, remained for John to put his decision into action. He turned to his desk, therefore, and wrote. The words to be employed he knew by heart, for he had composed his letter many months before, and it was with him always; yet now, seen thus set out upon paper for the first time, it looked strange.

‘*To the Commandant, Royal Artillery, Plymouth.*

‘RED HOUSE, CHAGFORD, DEVON.

‘SIR,—It has come to my knowledge that the man, William Blanchard, who enlisted in the Royal Artillery under the name of Tom Newcombe and deserted from his battery when it was stationed at Shorncliffe some ten years ago, now resides at this place on the farm of Monks Barton, Chagford. My duty demands that I should lodge this information, and I can, of course, substantiate it, though I have reason to believe the

deserter will not attempt to evade his just punishment if apprehended.—I have the honour to be, your obedient servant,

JOHN GRIMBAL

'(Capt. Royal —th Devon Yeomanry).'

He had just completed this communication when Martin arrived, and as he entered his brother instinctively pushed the letter out of sight. But a moment later he rebelled against himself for the act, knowing the ugly tacit admission represented by it. He dragged forth the letter, therefore, and greeted his brother by thrusting the note before him.

'Read that,' he said darkly; 'it will surprise you, I think. I want to do nothing underhand, and as you're linked to these people for life now, it is just that you should hear what is going to happen. There's the knowledge I once hinted to you that I possessed concerning William Blanchard. I have waited and given him rope enough. Now he's hanged himself, as I knew he would, and I must act. A few days ago he spoke disrespectfully of the Queen before a dozen other loafers in a public-house. That's a sin I hold far greater than his sin against me. Read what I have just written.'

Martin gazed with mildness upon John's savage and defiant face. His brother's expression and demeanour by no means chimed with the judicial moderation of his speech. Then the antiquary perused the letter, and there fell no sound upon the silence except that of a spluttering pen as John Grimal addressed an envelope.

Presently Martin dropped the letter on the desk before him, and his face was very white, his voice tremulous as he spoke.

'This thing happened more than ten years ago.'

'It did; but don't imagine I have known it ten years.'

'God forbid! I think better of you. Yet, if only

for my sake, reflect before you send this letter. Once done, you have ruined a life. I have seen Will several times since I came home, and now I understand the terrific change in him. He must have known that you know this. It was the last straw. He seems quite broken on the wheel of the world, and no wonder. To one of his nature the past, since you discovered this terrible secret, must have been sheer torment.'

John Grimal doubled up the letter and thrust it into the envelope, while Martin continued—

'What do you reap? You're not a man to do an action of this sort and live afterwards as though you had not done it. I warn you, you intend a terribly dangerous thing. This may be the wreck of another soul beside Blanchard's. I know your real nature, though you've hidden it so close of late years. Post that letter, and your life's bitter for all time. Look into your heart, and don't pretend to deceive yourself.'

His brother lighted a match, burnt red wax, and sealed the letter with a signet-ring.

'Duty is duty,' he said.

'Yes, yes; right shall be done and this extraordinary thing made known in the right quarter. But don't let it come out through you; don't darken your future by such an act. Your personal relations with the man, John—it's impossible you should do this after all these years.'

The other affixed a stamp to his letter

'Don't imagine personal considerations influence me. I'm a soldier, and I know what becomes a soldier. If I find a traitor to his Queen and country, am I to pass upon the other side of the road and not do my duty because the individual happens to be a private enemy? You rate me low and misjudge me rather cruelly if you imagine that I am so weak.'

Martin gasped at this view of the position, instantly

believed himself mistaken, and took John at his word. Thereon he came near blushing to think that he should have read such baseness into a brother's character.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I ought to be ashamed to have misunderstood you so. I could not escape the personal factor in this terrible business, but you, I see, have duly weighed it. I wronged you. Yes, I wronged you, as you say. The writing of that letter was a very courageous action under the circumstances—as plucky a thing as ever man did perhaps. Forgive me for taking so mean a view of it, and forgive me for even doubting your motives.'

'I want justice, and if I am misunderstood for doing my duty—why, that is no new thing. I can face that as better men have done before me.'

There was a moment or two of silence; then Martin spoke, almost joyfully.

'Thank God, I see a way out! It seldom happens that I am quick in any question of human actions, but, for once, I detect a road by which right may be done and you still spared this terrible task. I do, indeed, because I know Blanchard better than you do. I can guess what he has been enduring of late, and I will show him how he may end the torture himself by doing the right thing even now.'

'It's fear of me scorching the man, not shame of his own crime.'

'Then, as the stronger, as a soldier, put him out of his misery and set your mind at ease. Believe me, you may do it without any reflection on yourself. Tell him you have decided to take no step in the affair, and leave the rest to me. I will wager I can prevail upon him to give himself up. I am singularly confident that I can bring it about. Then, if I fail, do what you consider to be right, but first give me leave to try and save you from this painful necessity.'

There followed a long silence. John Grimbald saw how much easier it was to deceive another than himself, and before the spectacle of his deluded brother felt that he appreciated his own real motives and incentives at their true worth. The more completely was Martin hoodwinked, the more apparent did the truth grow within John's mind. What was in reality responsible for his intended action never looked clearer than then, and as Martin spoke in all innocence of the courage that must be necessary to perform such a deed, Grimbald passed through the flash of a white light and caught a glimpse of his recent mental processes magnified by many degrees in the blinding ray. The spectacle sickened him a little, weakened him, touched the depths of him, stirred his nature. He answered presently in a voice harsh, abrupt, and deep.

'I've lied often enough in my life,' he said, 'and may again, but I think never to you till to-day. You're such a clean-minded, big-hearted man that you don't understand a mind of my build—a mind that can't forgive, that can't forget, that's fed full for years on the thought of revenging that frightful blow in the past. What you feared and hinted just now was partly the truth, and I know it well enough. But that is only to say my motives in this matter are mixed.'

'None but a brave man would admit so much, but now you wrong yourself as I wronged you. We are alike. I too have sometimes in dark moments blamed myself for evil thoughts and evil deeds beyond my real deserts. So you. I know nothing but your sense of duty would make you post that letter.'

'We've wrecked each other's lives, he and I; only he's a boy, and his life's before him; I'm a man, and my life is lived, for I'm the sort that grows old early, and he's helped Time more than anybody knows but myself.'

'Don't say that. Happiness never comes when you are hungering most for it; sorrow never when you believe yourself best tuned to bear it. Once I thought as you do now. I waited long for my good fortune, and said "good-bye" to all hope of earthly delight.'

'You were easier to satisfy than I should have been. Yet you were constant too—constant as I was. We're built that way. More's the pity.'

'I have absolutely priceless blessings; my cup of happiness is full. Sometimes I ask myself how it comes about that one so little deserving has received so much; sometimes I waken in the very extremity of fear, for joy like mine seems greater than any living thing has a right to.'

'I'm glad one of us is happy.'

'I shall live to see you equally blessed.'

'It is impossible.'

There was a pause, then a gong rumbled in the hall, and the brothers went to dinner. Their conversation now ranged upon varied local topics, and it was not until the cloth had been moved, according to old-fashioned custom, and fruit and wine set upon a shining table, that John returned to the crucial subject of the moment.

He poured out a glass of port for Martin, and pushed the cigars towards him, then spoke—

'Drink. It's very good. And try one of those. I shall not post that letter.'

'Man, I knew it! I knew it well without hearing so from you. Destroy the thing, dear fellow, and so take the first step to a peace I fear you have not known for many days. All this suffering will vanish quicker than a dream then. Justice is great, but mercy is greater. Yours is the privilege of mercy, and yet justice shall not suffer either—not if I know Will Blanchard.'

They talked long and drank more than usual, while

the elder man's grim and moody spirit lightened a little before his determination and his wine. The reek of past passions, the wreckage of dead things, seemed to be sweeping out of his mind. He forgot the hour and their engagement until the time fixed for that conference was past. Then he looked at his watch, rose from the table, and hurried to the hall.

'Let us not go,' urged Martin. 'They will do very well without us, I am sure.'

But John's only answer was to pull on his driving gloves. He anticipated some satisfaction from the committee meeting; he suspected, indeed, that he would be asked to take the chair at it, and, like most men, he was not averse from the exercise of a little power in a small corner.

'We must go,' he said. 'I have important suggestions to make, especially concerning the volunteers. A sham-fight on Scorhill would be a happy thought. We'll drive fast, and only be twenty minutes late.'

A dog-cart had been waiting half an hour, and soon the brothers quickly whirled down Red House avenue. A groom dropped from behind and opened the gate; then it was all his agility could accomplish to scramble into his seat again as a fine horse, swinging along at twenty miles an hour, trotted towards Chagford.

CHAPTER XV

A BATTLE

SILENT and motionless sat Blanchard, on the fringe of a bank at the coppice edge. He watched the stars move onward and the shadows cast by moonlight creep from west to north, from north to east. Hawthorns scented the night and stood like masses of virgin silver

under the moon; from the Red House 'owl tree'—a pollarded elm sacred to the wise bird—came mewing of brown owls; and once a white one struck, swift as a streak of feathered moonlight on the copse edge, and passed so near to Blanchard that he saw the wretched shrew-mouse in its talons. "'Tis for the young birds somewheers,' he thought; 'an' so they'll thrive an' turn out braave owlets come bimebye; but the li'l, squeakin', blind shrews, what'll they do when no mother comes home-along to 'em?'

He mused drearily upon this theme, but suddenly started, for there came the echo of slow steps in the underwood behind him. They sank into silence and set Will wondering as to what they might mean. Then another sound, that of a galloping horse and the crisp ring of wheels, reached him, and, believing that John Grimbald was come, he strung himself to the matter in hand. But the vehicle did not stop. A flash of yellow light leapt through the distance as a mail-cart rattled past upon its way to Moreton. This circumstance told Will the hour, and he knew that his vigil could not be much longer protracted.

Then death stalked abroad again, but this time in a form that awoke the watcher's deep-rooted instincts, took him clean out of himself and angered him to passion, not in his own cause, but another's. There came the sudden scream of a trapped hare—that sound where terror and agony mingle in a cry half human—and so still was the hour that Blanchard heard the beast's struggles though it was fifty yards distant. A hare in a trap at any season meant a poacher—a hated enemy of society in Blanchard's mind; and his instant thought was to bring the rascal to justice if he could. Now the recent footfall was explained, and Will doubted not that cruel cry which had scattered his reveries would quickly attract some hidden man responsible

for it. The hare was caught by a wire set in a run at the edge of the wood, and now Blanchard crawled along on his stomach to within ten yards of the tragedy, and there waited under the shadow of a white-thorn at the edge of the woods. Within two minutes the bushes parted and, where the foliage of a young silver birch showered above lesser brushwood, a man with a small head and huge shoulders appeared. Seeing no danger he crept into the open, lifted his head to the moon and revealed the person and features of Sam Bonus, the labourer with whom Will had quarrelled in times long past. Here, then, right ahead of him appeared such a battle as Blanchard had desired, but with another foe than he anticipated. That accident mattered nothing, however. Will only saw a poacher, and to settle the business of such an one out of hand if possible was, in his judgment, a definite duty to be undertaken by every true man at any moment when opportunity offered.

He walked suddenly from shadow and stood within three yards of the robber as Bonus raised the butt of his gun to kill the shrieking beast at his feet.

'You! An' red-handed, by God! I knawed 'twas no lies they told of 'e.'

The other started and turned and saw who stood against him.

'Blanchard, is it? An' what be you doin' here? Come for same reason p'raps?'

'I'd make you pay, if 'twas awnly for sayin' that! I'm a man to steal others' fur out of season, ban't I? But I doan't have no words wi' the likes o' you. I've took you fair an' square anyways, an' will just ax if you be comin' wi'out a fuss, or am I to make 'e?'

The other snarled.

'You—you come a yard nearer an' I'll blaw your damned head——'

But the threat was left unfinished, and its execution failed, for Will had been taught to take an armed man in his early days on the river, and had seen an old hand capture more than one desperate character. He knew that instantaneous action might get him within the muzzle of the gun and out of danger, and while Bonus spoke, he flew straight upon him, with such unexpected celerity that Sam had no time to accomplish his purpose. He came down heavily with Blanchard on top of him, and his weapon fell from his hand. But the poacher was not done with. As they lay struggling, he found his foot clear and managed to kick Will twice on the leg above the knee. Then Blanchard, hanging like a dog to his foe, freed an arm, and hit hard more than once into Sam's face. A blow on the nose brought red blood that spurted over both men black as ink under the moonlight.

It was not long before they broke away and rose from their first struggle on the ground, but Bonus finally got to his knees, then to his feet, and Will, as he did the same, knew by a sudden twinge in his leg that if the poacher made off it must now be beyond his power to follow.

'No odds,' he gasped, answering his thought aloud, while they wrestled. 'If you've brawk me somewheers 'tis no matter for you'm marked all right, an' them squinting eyes of yourn'll be blacker'n sloes come marnin'.'

This obvious truth infuriated Bonus. He did not attempt to depart, but catching sight of his gun, made a tremendous effort to reach it. The other saw this aim and exerted his strength in an opposite direction. They fought in silence awhile—growled and cursed, sweated and swayed, stamped and slipped and dripped blood under the dewy and hawthorn-scented night. Bonus used all his strength to reach the gun; Will

sacrificed everything to his hold. He suffered the greater punishment for a while, because Sam fought with all his limbs like a beast; but presently Blanchard threw the poacher heavily, and again they came down together, this time almost on the wretched beast that still struggled, held by the wire at hand. It had dragged the fur off its leg, and white nerve fibres, torn bare, glimmered in the red flesh under the moon.

Both fighters were now growing weaker, and each knew that a few minutes more must decide the fortune of the battle. Bonus still fought for the gun, and now his weight began to tell. Then, as he got within reach, and stretched hand to grasp it, Blanchard, instead of dragging against him, threw all his force in the same direction, and Sam was shot clean over the gun. This time they twisted and Will fell underneath. Both simultaneously thrust a hand for the weapon; both gripped it, and then exerted their strength for possession. Will meant using it as a club if fate was kind; the other man, rating his own life at nothing, and believing that he bore Blanchard the grudge of his own ruin, intended, at that red-hot moment, to keep his word, and blow the other's brains out if he got a chance to do so.

Then, unheard by the combatants, a distant gate was thrown open, two brilliant yellow discs of fire shone along the avenue below, and John Grimbal returned to his home. Suddenly, seeing figures fighting furiously on the edge of the hill not fifty yards away, he pulled up, and a din of conflict sounded in his ears as the rattle of hoof and wheel and harness ceased. Leaping down he ran to the scene of the conflict as fast as possible, but it was ended before he arrived. A gun suddenly exploded and flashed a red-hot tongue of flame across the night. A hundred echoes caught the detonation, and as the discharge reverberated along

the stony hills to Fingle Gorge, Will Blanchard staggered backwards and fell in a heap, while the poacher reeled, then steadied himself and vanished under the woods.

'Bring a lamp,' shouted Grimbald, and a moment later his groom obeyed; but the fallen man was sitting up by the time John reached him and the gun that had exploded was at his feet.

'You'm tu late by half a second,' he gasped. 'I fired myself when I seed the muzzle clear. Poachin' he was, but the man's marked all right. Send p'liceman for Sam Bonus to-morrer, an' I lay you'll find a picter.'

'Blanchard!'

'Ess fay, an' no harm done 'cept a stiff leg. Best to knock thicky poor twoad on the head. I heard the scream of un and comed along an' waited an' caught my gen'leman in the act.'

The groom held a light to the mangled hare.

'Scat it on the head,' said Will, 'then give me a hand.'

He was helped to his feet; the servant went on before with the lamp, and Blanchard, finding himself able to walk without difficulty, proceeded, slowly supporting himself by the poacher's gun.

Grimbald waited for him to speak and presently he did so.

'Things falls out so differ'nt in this maze of a world from what man may count on.'

'How came it that you were here?'

'Blamed if I can tell 'e till I gather my wits together. 'Pears half a century or so since I comed; yet ban't above three hour agone.'

'You didn't come to see Sam Bonus, I suppose?'

'No fay! Never a man further from my thought than him when I seed un poke up his carrot head under the moon. I was 'pon my awn affairs an' comed to see you. I wanted straight speech an' straight

hitting; an' I got 'em for that matter. An' fightin''s gude for the blood, I reckon—anyway for my fashion blood.'

'You came to fight me then?'

'I did—if I could make 'e fight.'

'With that gun?'

'With nought but a savage heart an' my two fistes. The gun belongs to Sam Bonus. Leastways it did, but 'tis mine now—or yours as the party most wronged.'

'Come this way and drink a drop of brandy before you go home. Glad you had some fighting as you wanted it so bad. I know what it feels like to be that way too. But there wouldn't have been blows between us. My mind was made up. I wrote to Plymouth this afternoon. I wrote, and an hour later decided not to post the letter. I've changed my intentions altogether, because the point begins to appear in a new light. I'm sorry for a good few things that have happened of late years.'

Will breathed hard a moment; then he spoke slowly and not without more emotion than his words indicated.

'That's straight speech—if you mean it. I never knawed how 'twas that a sportsman, same as you be, could keep rakin' awver a job an' drive a plain chap o' the soil like me into hell for what I done ten year ago.'

'Let the past go. Forget it; banish it for all time as far as you have the power. Blame must be buried both sides. Here's the letter upon my desk. I'll burn it, and I'll try to burn the memory of ten years with it. Your road's clear for me.'

'Thank you,' said Blanchard, very slowly. 'I lay I'll never hear no better news than that on this airth. Now I'm free—free to do how I please, free to do it undriven.'

There was a long silence. Grimbald poured out half

a tumbler of brandy, added soda-water, then handed the stimulant to Will; and Blanchard, after drinking, sat in comfort awhile, rubbed his swollen jaw, and scraped the dried blood of Bonus off his hands.

‘Why for did you chaange so sudden?’ he asked, as Grimbald turned to his desk.

‘I could tell you, but it doesn’t matter. A letter in the mind looks different to one on paper; and duty often changes its appearance too when a man is honest with himself. To be honest with yourself is the hardest sort of honesty. I’ve had speech with others about this—my brother more particularly.’

‘I wish to God us could have settled it without no help from outside.’

Grimbald rang the bell, then answered.

‘As to settling it, I know nothing about that. I’ve settled with my own conscience—such as it is.’

‘I’d come for “Yes” or “No.”’

‘Now you have a definite answer.’

‘An’ thank you. Then what’s it to be between us, when I come back? Them as ban’t enemies no more might grow to be friends—eh?’

What response Grimbald would have made is doubtful. He did not reply, for his servant, Lawrence Vallack, entered at the moment, and he turned abruptly upon the old man.

‘Where’s the letter I left upon my desk? It was directed to Plymouth.’

‘All right, sir, all right; don’t worrit. I’ve eyes in my head for my betters still, thank God. I seed un when I come to shut the shutters an’ sent Joe post-haste to the box. ’Twas in plenty of time for the mail.’

John emptied his lungs in a great respiration half sigh, half groan. He could not speak. Only his fingers closed and he half lifted his hand as though

to crush the smirking ancient. Then he dropped his arm and looked at Blanchard, asking the question with his eyes that he could find no words for.

'I heard the mail go just 'fore the hare squealed,' said Will stolidly, 'an' the letter with it for certain.'

Grimbal started up and rushed to the hall while the other limped after him.

'Doan't 'e do nothin' fulish. I believe you never meant to post un. Ess, I'll take your solemn word for that. An' if you didn't mean to send letter, 'tis as if you hadn't sent un. For my mind weer fixed whatever you might do.'

'Don't jaw, now! There's time to stop the mail yet. I can get to Moreton as soon or sooner than that crawling cart if I ride. I won't be fooled like this!'

He ran to the stables, called to the groom, clapped a saddle on the horse that had just brought him home, and in about three minutes was riding down the avenue, while his lad reached the gate and swung it open before him. Then Grimbal galloped into the night, with heart and soul fixed upon his letter. He meant to recover it at any reasonable cost. The white road streaked away beneath him, and a breeze created by his own rapid progress steadied him as he hastened on. Presently at a hill foot, he saw how to save a mile or more by short cuts over meadow-land, so left the highway, rode through a hay-field, and dashed from it by a gap into a second. Then he grunted and the sound was one of satisfaction, for his tremendous rate of progress had served its object and already, creeping on the main road far ahead, he saw the vehicle which held the mails.

Meanwhile Blanchard and the man-servant stood and watched John Grimbal's furious departure.

'Pity,' said Will. 'No call to do it. I've took his

word an' the end's the same, letter or no letter. Now let me finish that theer brandy, then I'll go home.'

But Mr. Vallack heard nothing. He was gazing out into the night and shaking with fear.

'High treason 'gainst the law of the land to lay a finger on the Mail. A letter posted be like a stone flinged or a word spoken: out of our keeping for all time. An' me to blame for it. I'm a ruined man along o' taking tu much 'pon myself an' being tu eager for others. He'll fling me out sure's death. 'Tis all up wi' me.'

'As to that, I reckon many a dog gets a kick wheer he thinks he's earned a pat,' said Will, 'that's life, that is. An' maybe theer's sore hearts in dumb beasts tu sometimes, for a dog loves praise like a woman. He won't sack 'e. You done what 'peared your duty.'

Blanchard then left the house, slowly proceeded along the avenue and presently passed out on to the high-road. As he walked the pain of his leg diminished, but he put no strain upon it and proceeded very leisurely towards home. Great happiness broke into his mind, undimmed by aching bones and bruises. The reflection that he was reconciled to John Grimbald crowded out lesser thoughts. He knew the other had spoken truth and accepted his headlong flight to arrest the mail as sufficient proof of it. Then he thought of the possibility of giving himself up before Grimbald's letter should come to be read.

At home Phœbe was lying awake in misery waiting for him. She had brought up to their bedroom a great plate of cold bacon with vegetables and a pint of beer; and as Will slowly appeared she uttered a cry and embraced him with thanksgivings. Upon Blanchard's mind the return to his wife impressed various strange thoughts. He soothed her, comforted her, and assured her of his safety. But to him it seemed that

he spoke with a stranger, for half a century of experience appeared to stretch between the present and his departure from Monks Barton about three hours before. His wife experienced similar sensations. That this cheerful, battered, hungry man, could be the same who had stormed from her into the night a few short hours before, appeared impossible.

CHAPTER XVI

A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS

MR. BLEE, to do him justice, was usually the first afoot at Monks Barton, both winter and summer. The maids who slept near him needed no alarum, for his step on the stair and his high-pitched summons, 'Now then, you lazy gals, what be snorin' theer for, an' the day broke?' was always sufficient to insure their wakening.

At an early hour of the morning that dawned upon Will's nocturnal adventures, Billy stood in the farmyard and surveyed the shining river to an accompaniment of many musical sounds. On Monks Barton thatches the pigeons cooed and bowed and gurgled to their ladies, cows lowed from the byres, cocks crew, and the mill wheel, already launched upon the business of the day, panted from its dark habitation of dripping moss and fern.

Billy sniffed the morning, then proceeded to a pig's sty, opened a door within it, and chuckled at the spectacle that greeted him.

'Burnish it all! auld sow's farrowed at last then. Busy night for her sure 'nough! An' so fine a litter as ever I seed by the looks of it.'

He bustled off to get refreshment for the gaunt,

new-made mother, and as he did so met Ted Chown, who now worked at Mr. Lyddon's, and had just arrived from his home in Chagford.

'Marnin', sir; have 'e heard the news? Gert tidings up-long I 'sure 'e.'

'Not so gert as what I've got, I'll lay. Butivul litter 'tis. Come an' give me a hand.'

'Bonus was catched poachin' last night to the Red House. An' he've had his faace smashed in. Nose broke an' all. He escaped arter; but he went to Doctor fust thing to-day an' got hissself plastered; an' then, knawin' 'tweern't no use to hide, comed right along an' gived hissself up to faither.'

'My stars! An' no more'n what he desarved, that's certain.'

'But that ban't all even. Maister Jan Grimbals missing! He rode off last night, Lard knaws wheer, an' never a sign of un seed since; they've sent to the station 'bout it a'ready, an' they'm scourin' the airth for un. An' 'twas Maister Blanchard as fought wi' Bonus, for Sam said so.'

'Guy Fawkes an' angels! Here, you mix this. I must tell Miller an' run about a bit. Gwaine to be a gert day by the looks of it!'

He hurried into the house, met his master, and began with breathless haste—

'Awful doin's! Awful doin's, Miller. Such a sweet-smellin' marnin' tu! Bear yourself stiff against it, for us caan't say what remains to be told.'

'What's wrong now? Doan't choke yourself. You'm grawin' tu auld for all the excitements of modern life, Billy. Wheer's Will?'

'You may well ax. Sleepin' still, I reckon, for he comed in long arter midnight. I was stirrin' at the time an' heard un. Sleepin' arter black deeds, if all they tell be true.'

'Black deeds!'

'The bwoy Ted's just come wi' it. 'Tis this way, Bonus be at death's door wi' a smashed nose, an' Blanchard done it; an' Jan Grimbal's vanished off the faace o' the airth. Not a sign of un seed arter he drove away last night from the Jubilee gathering. An' if 'tis murder, you'll be in the witness-box knawin' the parties same as you do; an' the sow's got a braave litter, though what's that arter such news?'

'Guess you'm dreamin', Blee,' said Mr. Lyddon, as he took his hat and walked into the farmyard.

Billy was hurt.

'Dreamin' be I? I'm a man as dreams blue murders of coourse! Tu auld to be relied on now, I s'pose. Theer! Theer!' he changed his voice and it ran into a cracked scream of excitement. 'Theer! P'raps I'm dreamin', as Inspector Chown an' Constable Lamacraft be walkin' in the gate this instant moment!'

But there was no mistaking this fact. Abraham Chown entered, marched solemnly to the party at the door, cried 'Halt!' to his subordinate, then turned to Mr. Lyddon.

'Good-day to you, Miller,' he said, 'though 'tis a bad day I'm fearin'. I be here for William Blanchard, *alias* Tom Newcombe.'

'If you mean my son-in-law, he's not out of bed to my knowledge.'

'Dear sawls! Doan't 'e say 'tis blue murder—doan't 'e say that!' implored Mr. Blee. His head shook and his tongue revolved round his lips.

'Not as I knaws. We'm actin' on instructions from the military to Plymouth.'

'Theer's allus wickedness hid under a alias notwithstanding,' declared Billy, rather disappointed; 'have 'e found Jan Grimbal?'

'They be searchin' for un. Jim Luke, Inspector to

Moreton, an' his men be out beatin' the country. But I'm here, wi' my staff, for William Blanchard. March !'

Lamacraft, thus addressed, proceeded a pace or two until stopped by Mr. Lyddon.

'No call to go in. He'll come down. But I'm sore puzzled to knaw what this means, for only last night I heard tell from Jan Grimbal's awn lips that he'd changed his mind about a private matter bearin' on this.'

'I want the man anyways, an' I be gwaine to have un,' declared Inspector Chown. He brought a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and gave them to the constable.

'Put up them gashly things, Abraham Chown,' said the Miller sternly. 'Doan't 'e knaw Blanchard better'n that?'

'Handcuffed he'll be, whether he likes it or not,' answered the other; 'an' if theer's trouble, I bid all present an' any able-bodied men 'pon the premises to help me take him in the Queen's name.'

Billy hobbled round the corner, thrust two fingers into his mouth and blew a quavering whistle; whereupon two labourers, working a few hundred yards off, immediately dropped their tools and joined him.

'Run you here,' he cried. 'P'lice be comed to taake Will Blanchard, an' us must all give the Law a hand, for theer'll be blows struck if I knaw un.'

'Will Blanchard! What have he done?'

'Been under a alias—that's the least of it, but—God, He knaws—it may rise to murder. 'Tis our bounden duty to help Chown against un.'

'Be danged if I do!' said one of the men.

'Nor me,' declared the other. 'Let Chown do his job hisself—an' get his jaw broke for his trouble.'

But they followed Mr. Blee to where the Miller still argued against Lamacraft's entrance.

'Why didn't they send soldiers for un? That's what he reckoned on,' said Mr. Lyddon.

'Tis my job fust.'

'I'm sorry you've come in this high spirit. You know the man and ought to taake his word he'd go quiet and my guarantee for it.'

'I know my duty, an' doan't want no teachin' from you.'

'You're a fule!' said Miller, in some anger. 'An' 'twill take more'n you an' that moon-faaced lout to put them things on the man, or I'm much mistaken.'

He went indoors while the labourers laughed, and the younger constable blushed at the insult.

'How do 'e like that, Peter Lamacraft?' asked a labourer.

'No odds to me,' answered the policeman, licking his hands nervously and looking at the door. 'I ban't feared of nought said or done if I've got the Law behind me. An' you'm liable yourself if you doan't help.'

'Caan't wait no more,' declared Mr. Chown. 'If he's in bed, us'll take un in bed. Come on, you!'

Thus ordered to proceed, Lamacraft set his face resolutely forward and was just entering the farm when Phoebe appeared. Her tears were dry, though her voice was unsteady and her eyelids red.

'Gude mornin', Mr. Chown,' she said.

'Marnin', ma'am. Let us pass, if you please.'

'Are you coming in? Why?'

'Us caan't bide no more an' us caan't give no more reasons. The Law ban't 'spected to give reasons for its deeds, an' us won't be bamboozled an' put off a minute longer,' answered Chown grimly. 'March! I tell 'e, Peter Lamacraft.'

'You caan't see my husband.'

'But we'm gwaine to see un. He've got to see me an' come along wi' me tu. An' if he's wise, he'll come

quiet an' keep his mouth shut. That much I'll tell un for his gude.'

'If you'll listen, I might make you onderstand how 'tis you caan't see Will,' said Phœbe quietly. 'You must knaw he runned away an' went soldiering before he married me. Then he come back for love of me wi'out axin' any man's leave.'

'So much the worse, ma'am; he'm a deserter!'

'The dark wickedness!' gasped Mr. Blee; 'an' him dumb as a newt 'bout it all these years an' years! The conscience of un!'

'Well, you needn't trouble any more,' continued Phœbe to the policemen. 'My husband be gwaine to take this matter into his awn hands now.'

Inspector Chown laughed.

'That's gude, that is! Now he'm blawn upon!'

'He's gwaine to give himself up—he caan't do more,' said Phœbe, turning to her father who now reappeared.

'Coourse he caan't do more. What more do 'e want?' the Miller inquired.

'Him,' answered Mr. Chown. 'No more an' no less; an' everything said will be used against him.'

'You glumpy auld Dowl!' growled a labouring man.

'All right, all right. You just wait, all of 'e! Wheer's the man? How much longer be I to bide his pleasure? March! Damn it all, be the Law a laughing-stock?' The Inspector was growing very hot and excited.

'He's gone,' said Phœbe, as Mr. Lamacraft entered the farm, put one foot on the bottom step of the stairs, then turned for further orders. 'He's gone, before light. He rested two hours or so, then us harnessed the trap an' he drove away to Moreton to take fust train to Plymouth by way o' Newton Abbot. An' he said as Ted Chown was to go in arter breakfast an' drive the trap home.'

'Couldn't tell me nothin' as had pleased me better,' said the Miller. 'Tis a weight off me—an' off him I reckon. Now you'm answered, my son; you can telegraph back as you comed wi' your auld handcuffs tu late by hours, an' that the man's on his way to give hisself up.'

'I've only got your word for it.'

'An' what better word should 'e have?' piped Billy, who in the space of half a minute had ranged himself alongside his master. 'You to question the word o' Miller Lyddon, you crooked-hearted raven! Who was it spoke for 'e fifteen year ago an' got 'em to make 'e p'liceman 'cause you was tu big a fule to larn any other trade? Gert thankless twoad! An' who was it let 'em keep the "Green Man" awpen two nights in wan week arter closin'-time, 'cause he wanted another drop hisself?'

'Come you away,' said the Inspector to his constable. 'Ban't for the likes of we to have any talk wi' the likes o' they. But they'll hear more of this; an' if theer's been any hookem-snivey dealin's with the Law, they'll live to be sorry. An' you follow me likewise,' he added to his son, who stood hard by. 'You come wi' me, Ted, for you doan't do no more work for runaway soldiers, nor yet bald-headed auld antics like this here!'

He pointed at Mr. Blee, then turned to depart.

'Get off honest man's land, you black-bearded beast!' screamed Billy. 'You'm most like of any wan ever I heard tell of to do murder yourself; an' auld as I be, I'd crawl on my hands an' knees to see you scragged for't, if'twas so far as the sun in heaven!'

'That's libel,' answered Mr. Chown, with cold and haughty authority; 'an' you've put yourself in the grip of the Law by sayin' it, as you'll knaw before you'm much aulder.'

Then, with this trifling advantage, he retreated, while Lamacraft and Ted brought up the rear.

'So theer's an end of that. Now us'll fall to wi' no worse appetites,' declared Miller. 'An' as to Will,' he added, 'fore you chaps go, just mind an' judge no man till you know what's proved against him. Onless theer's worse behind than I've larned so far, I'm gwaine to stand by un.'

'An' me tu!' said Mr. Blee, with a fine disregard for his recent utterances. 'I've teached the chap purty nigh all he knaws, an' I ban't gwaine to turn on un now, onless 'tis proved blue murder. An' that Chown's a disgrace to his cloth; an' I'd pull his ugly bat's ears on my awn behalf if I was a younger an' spryer man.'

CHAPTER XVII

SUSPENSE

THE fate of John Grimbald was learned within an hour or two of Inspector Chown's departure from Monks Barton; and, by the time that Martin Grimbald had been apprised of the matter, his brother already lay at the Red House.

John had been found at daybreak upon the grass land where he rode overnight on his journey to intercept the mail. A moment after he descried the distant cart, his horse had set foot in a hole; and upon the accident being discovered, the beast was found lying with a broken leg within twenty yards of its insensible master. His horse was shot; John Grimbald carried home with all despatch; and Doctor Parsons arrived as quickly as possible, to do all that might be done for the sufferer until an abler physician than himself reached the scene.

Three dreary days saw Grimbald at the door of death, then a brief interval of consciousness rewarded unceasing care, and a rumour spread that he might yet survive. Martin, when immediate fear for his brother's life was relieved, busied himself about Blanchard, and went to Plymouth. There he saw Will, learned all facts concerning the letter, and did his best to win information of the prisoner's probable punishment. Fears, magnified rumours, expressed opinions, mostly erroneous, buzzed in the ears of the anxious party at Monks Barton. Then Martin Grimbald returned to Chagford, and there came an evening when those most interested assembled after supper at the farm to hear all he could tell them.

Long faces grouped round Martin as he made his statement in a grey June twilight. Mr. Blee and the Miller smoked, Mrs. Blanchard sat with her hand in her daughter's, and Phoebe occupied a comfortable arm-chair by the wood fire. Between intervals of silence came loud juicy sounds from Billy's pipe, and when light waned they still talked on until Chris stirred herself and sought the lamp.

'They tell me,' began Martin, 'that a deserting soldier is punished according to his character and with regard to the fact whether he surrenders himself or is apprehended. Of course we know Will gave himself up, but then they will find out that he knew poor John's unfortunate letter had reached its destination—or at any rate started for it; and they may argue, not knowing the truth, that it was the fact of the information being finally despatched made Will surrender. They will say, I am afraid, as they said to me: "Why did he wait until now if he meant to do the right thing? Why did he not give himself up long ago?"'

'That's easy answered: to please others,' explained Mr. Lyddon. 'Fust theer was his promise to Phoebe,

then his mother's illness, then his other promise, to bide till his wife was brought to bed. Looking back, I see we was wrong to use our power against his awn wish ; but so it stands.'

'I ought to go ; I ought to be alongside un,' moaned Phœbe ; 'I was at the bottom of everything from fust to last. For me he run away ; for me he stopped away. Mine's the blame, an' them as judge him should knaw it an' hear me say so.'

'Caan't do no such vain thing as that,' declared Mr. Blee. "'Twas never allowed as a wife should be heard 'pon the doin's of her awn husband. 'Cause why? She'd be one-sided—either plump for un through thick an' thin, or else all against un, as the case might stand.'

'As to the sentence,' continued Martin, 'if a man with a good character deserts and thinks better of it and goes back to his regiment, he is not as a rule tried by court-martial at all. Instead, he loses all his former service and has to begin to reckon his period of engagement—six or seven years perhaps—all over again. But a notoriously bad character is tried by court-martial in any case, whether he gives himself up or not ; and he gets a punishment according to the badness of his past record. Such a man would have from eighty-four days' imprisonment, with hard labour, up to six months, or even a year, if he had deserted more than once. Then the out-and-out rascals are sentenced to be "dismissed her Majesty's service."'

'But the real gude men,' pleaded Phœbe—'them as had no whisper 'gainst 'em, same as Will? They couldn't be hard 'pon them, 'specially if they knawed all?'

'I should hope not ; I'm sure not. You see the case is so unusual, as an officer explained to me, and such a great length of time has elapsed between the action and the judgment upon it. That is in Will's favour. A good soldier with a clean record who deserts and is

apprehended does not get more than three months with hard labour and sometimes less. That's the worst that can happen, I hope.'

'What's hard labour to him?' murmured Billy, whose tact on occasions of universal sorrow was sometimes faulty. "'Tis the rankle of bein' in every blackguard's mouth that'll cut Will to the quick.'

'What blackguards say and think ban't no odds,' declared Mrs. Blanchard. "'Tis better—far better he should do what he must do. The disgrace is in the minds of them that lick theer lips upon his sorrow. Let him pay for a wrong deed done, for the evil he did that gude might come of it. I see the Right Hand o' God holdin' the li'l strings of my son's life, an' I knaw better'n any of 'e what'll be in the bwoy's heart now.'

'Yet, when all's said, 'tis a mournful sarcumstance an' sent for our chastening,' contended Mr. Blee stoutly. 'Us mustn't argue away the torment of it an' pretend 'tis nought. Ban't a pleasing thing, 'specially at such a time when all the airth's gwaine daft wi' joy for the gracious gudeness o' God to the Queen o' England. In plain speech 'tis a damn dismal come-along-of-it, an' I've cried by night, auld though I am, to think o' the man's babes grawin' up wi' this round theer necks. An' wan to be born while he'm put away! Theer's a black picksher for 'e! Him doin' hard labour as the Law directs, an' his wife doin' hard labour tu—in her lonely bed! Why, gormed if I——'

'For God's sake shut your mouth, you horrible old man!' burst out Martin, as Phoebe hurried away in tears and Chris followed her. 'You're a disgrace to humanity, and I don't hesitate—I don't hesitate at all to say you have no proper feeling in you!'

'Martin's right, Billy,' declared Mr. Lyddon without emotion. 'You'm a thought tu quick to meet other people's troubles half-way, as I've told 'e before to-

night. Ban't a comely trait in 'e. You've made her run off sobbing her poor, bruised heart out. As if she hadn't wept enough o' late. Do 'e think us caan't see what it all means an' the wisht cloud that's awver all our heads, lookin' darker by contrast wi' the happiness of the land, owing to the Jubilee of a gert Queen? Coourse we knaw. But 'tis poor wisdom to talk 'bout the blackness of a cloud to them-as be tryin' to find its silver lining. If you caan't lighten trouble, best to hold your peace.'

'What's the use of cryin' "Peace" when us knaws in our hearts 'tis war? Us must look inside an' outside, an' count the cost same as I be doin' now,' declared Mr. Blee. 'Then to be caught up so harsh 'mong friends! Well, well, gude night all; I'll go to my rest. Hard words doan't break, though they may bruise. But I'll do my duty whether or no.'

He rose and shuffled to the door, then looked round and opened his mouth to speak again. But he changed his mind, shook his head, snorted expressively and disappeared.

'A strange-fashioned chap,' commented Mrs. Blanchard, 'wi' sometimes a wise word stuck in his sour speech, like a gude currant in a bad dumpling.'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NIGHT OF JUBILEE

UNNUMBERED joy fires were writing the nation's thanksgiving across the starry darkness of a night in June. Throughout the confines of Britain—on knolls arising beside populous towns, above the wild cliffs of our coasts, in low-lying lands, upon the banks of rivers, at

the fringes of forests and over a thousand barren heaths, lonely wastes, and stony pinnacles of untamed hills, like some mundane galaxy of stars or many-tongued outbreak of conflagration, the bonfires glimmered. And their golden seed was sown so thickly, that from scarce one pile of those hundreds then brightening the hours of darkness had it been possible to gaze into the night and see no other.

Upon the shaggy fastnesses of Devon's central waste, within the bounds, metes, and precincts of Dartmoor Forest, there shone a whole constellation of little suns, and a wanderer in air might have counted a hundred without difficulty, whilst for the beholders perched upon Yes Tor, High Willhays, or the bosom of Cosdon during the fairness and clearness of that memorable night, fully threescore beacons flamed. All those granite giants within the field of man's activities, all the monsters whose enormous shades fell at dawn or evening time upon the hamlets and villages of the Moor, now carried on their lofty crowns the flames of rejoicing. Bonfires of varying size, according to the energy and importance of the communities responsible for them, dotted the circumference of the lonely region in a vast, irregular figure, but thinned and ceased towards the unpeopled heart of the waste. On Wattern, at Cranmere, upon Fur Tor, and under the hoary, haunted woods of Wistman, no glad beacons blazed or voices rang. There Nature, ignorant of epochs and heeding neither olympiad nor lustrum, cycle nor century, ruled alone; there, all self-centred, self-contained, unwitting of conscious existence and its little joys, her perfection above praise and more enduring than any chronicle of it, asking for no earthborn acclamations of her eternal reign, demanding only obedience from all on penalty of death, the Mother swayed her sceptre unseen. Seed and stone, blade and berry, hot blood and cold, did her

bidding and slept or stirred at her ordinance. A night-jar harshly whirred beneath her footstool; wan tongues of flame rose and fell upon her quaking altars; a mountain fox, pattering quick-footed to the rabbit-warren, caught light from those exhalations in his round, green eyes, and barked.

Humanity thronged and made merry around numberless crackling piles of fire. Men and women, boys and girls, most noisily rejoiced, and from each flaming centre of festivity a thin sound of human shouting and laughter streamed starward with the smoke.

Removed by brief distance in space, the onlooker, without overmuch strain or imagination, might stride a pace or two backward in time and conceive himself for a moment as in the presence of those who similarly tended beacons on these granite heights of old. Then, truly, the object and occasion were widely different; then, perchance, in answer to evil rumour moving zig-zag on black bat-wings through nights of fear, many a bale fire had shot upwards, upon the keystone of Cosdon's solemn arch, beckoned like a bloody hand towards north and south, and cried danger to a thousand British warriors lurking in moor, and fen, and forest. Answering flames had leapt from Hay Tor, from Buckland Beacon, from Great Mis Tor in the west; and their warning, caught up elsewhere, would quickly penetrate to the heart of the South Hams, to the outlying ramparts of the Cornish wastes, to Exmoor and the coast-line of the north. But no laughter echoed about those old-time fires. Their lurid light smeared wolfskins, splashed on metal and untanned hide, illumined barbaric adornments, fierce faces, wild locks, and savage eyes. Anxious Celtic mothers and maidens stood beside their men, while fear and rage leapt along from woman's face to woman's face, as some gasping wretch, with twoscore miles of wilderness behind him, told of

high-beaked monsters moving under banks of oars, of dire peril, of death and ruin, suddenly sprung in a night from behind the rim of the sea.

Since then the peaks of the Moor have smiled or scowled under countless human fires, have flashed glad tidings or flamed ill news to many generations. And now, perched upon one enormous mass of stone, there towered upward a beacon of blazing furze and pine. In its heart were tar barrels, and the monster bred heat enough to remind the granite beneath it of those fires that first moulded its elvan ingredients to a concrete whole and hurled them hither.

About this eye of flame crowded those who had built it, and the roaring mass of red-hot timber and seething pitch represented the consummation of Chagford's festivities on the night of Jubilee. The flames, obedient to such light airs as were blowing, bent in unison with the black billows of smoke that wound above them. Great trembling tongues separated from the mass and soared upward gleaming as they vanished; sparks and jets, streams and stars of light shot from the pile to illuminate the rolling depths of the smoke cloud, to fret its curtain with spangles and jewels of gold and ruby, to weave strange lurid lights into the very fabric of its volume. Far away, as the breezes drew them, fell a red glimmer of fire, where those charred fragments caught in the rush and hurled aloft, returned again to earth; and the whole incandescent structure, perched as it was upon the apex of Kes Tor, suggested at a brief distance a fiery top-knot of streaming flame on some vast and demoniac head thrust upward from the nether world.

Great splendour of light gleamed upon a ring of human beings. Adventurous spirits leapt forth, fed the flames with faggots and furze, and risked their hairy faces within the range of the bonfire's scorching breath.

Alternate gleam and glow played fantastically upon the spectators, and though for the most part they moved but little while their joy fire was at its height, the conflagration caused a sheer devil's dance of impish light and shadow to race over every face and form in the assemblage. The fantastic magician of the fire threw humps on to straight backs, flattened good round breasts, wrote wrinkles on smooth faces, turned eyes and lips into shining gems, made white teeth yellow, cast a grotesque spell of the unreal on young shapes, of the horrible upon old ones. A sort of monkey coarseness crept into the red, upturned faces; their proportions were distorted, their delicacy destroyed. Essential lines of figures were concealed by the inky shadows; unimportant features were thrown into a violent prominence; the clean fire impinged abruptly on a night of black shade, as sunrise on the moon. There was no atmosphere. Human noses poked weirdly out of nothing, human hands waved without arms, human heads moved without bodies, bodies bobbed along without legs. The heart-beat and furnace roar of the fire was tremendous, but the shouts of men, the shriller laughter of women, and the screams and yells of children could be heard through it, together with the pistol-like explosion of sap, turned to steam and rending its way from green wood. Other sounds also fretted the air, for a hundred yards distant—in a hut circle—the Chagford drum and fife band lent its throb and squeak to the hour, and struggled amain to increase universal joy. So the fire flourished, and the plutonian rock mass of the tor arose the centre of a scene itself plutonian.

Removed by many yards from the ring of human spectators, and scattered in wide order upon the flanks of the hill, stood tame beasts. Sheep huddled there and bleated amazement, their fleeces touched by the

flicker of the distant fire; red heifers and steers also faced the flame and chewed the cud upon a spectacle outside all former experience; while inquisitive ponies drew up in a wide radius, snorted and sniffed with delicate, dilated nostrils at the unfamiliar smell of the breeze, threw up their little heads, fetched a compass at top speed and so returned; then crowded flank to flank, shoulder to shoulder, and again blankly gazed at the fire which reflected itself in the whites of their shifty eyes.

Fitting the freakish antics of the red light a carnival spirit, hard to rouse in northern hearts, awakened within this crowd of Devon men and women, old men and children. There was in their exhilaration some inspiration from the joyous circumstance they celebrated; and something, too, from the barrel. Dancing began, and games, feeble by day, but not lacking devil when pursued under cover of darkness. There was hugging and kissing, and yells of laughter when amorous couples, who believed themselves safe, were suddenly revealed lip to lip and heart to heart by a flash of fire. Some, as their nature was, danced and screamed that flaming hour away; some sat blankly and smoked and gazed with less interest than the outer audience of dumb animals; some laboured amain to keep the bonfire at blaze. These last worked from habit and forgot their broadcloth. None bade them; but it was their life to be toiling; it came naturally to mind and muscle, and they laughed while they laboured and sweated. A dozen staid groups witnessed the scene from surrounding eminences, but did not join the merry-makers. Mr. Shorto-Champernowne, Dr. Parsons and the ladies of their houses, stood with their feet on a tumulus apart; and elsewhere Mr. Chapple, Charles Coomstock, Mr. Blee and others, mostly ancient, sat on the granite, inspected the

pandemonium spread before them, and criticised as experts who had seen bonfires lighted before the greater part of the present gathering was out of its cradle. But no cynic praising of past time to the disparagement of the present marked their opinions. Mr. Chapple indeed pronounced the fire brilliantly successful, and did not hesitate to declare that it capped all his experience in this direction.

'A braave blaze,' he said, 'a blaze as gives the thoughtful eye an' nose a tidy guess at what the Pit's like to be. Ess indeed, a religious fire, so to say; an' I warrant the prophet sat along just such another when he said man was born to trouble sure as the sparks fly up'ard.'

Somewhat earlier on that same night, under the eastern ramparts of Dartmoor, and upon the long, creeping hill that rises aloft from Okehampton, then dips again, passes beneath the Belstones and winds by Sticklepath and Zeal under Cosdon, there rattled a trap holding two men. From their conversation it appeared that one was a traveller who now returned southward from a journey.

'Gert, gay, fanciful doin's to-night,' said the driver, looking aloft where Cosdon Beacon swelled. 'You can see the light from the blaze up-long, an' now an' again you can note a sign in the night like a red-hot wire drawed up out the airth. They'm sky-rockets, I judge.'

'Tis a joyful night, sure 'nough.'

The driver illustrated a political ignorance quite common in rural districts ten years ago and not conspicuously rare to-day. He laboured under uneasy suspicions that the support of monarchy was a direct and dismal tax upon the pockets of the poor.

'Pity all the fuss ban't about a better job,' he said.

'Wan auld elderly lady's so gude as another, come to think of it. Why shouldn't my mother have a jubilee?'

'What for? 'Cause she've borne a damned fule?' asked the other man angrily. 'If that's your way o' thought, best keep it in your thoughts. Anyhow I'll knock your silly head off if I hears another word to that tune, so now you knaw.'

The speaker was above medium height and breadth, the man who drove him happened to be unusually small.

'Well, well, no offence,' said the latter.

'There is offence; an' if I heard a lord o' the land talk that way to-night, I'd make un swallow every dirty word of it. To hell wi' your treason!'

The driver changed the subject.

'Now you can see a gude few new fires,' he said. 'That's the Throwleigh blaze; an' that long ways off be——'

'Kes Tor by the look of it. All Chagford's traapsed up-long, I warn 'e, to-night.'

They were now approaching a turning of the ways and the traveller suddenly changed his destination.

'Come to think of it, I'll go straight on,' he said. 'That'll save you a matter o' ten miles tu. Drive ahead a bit Berry Down way. Theer I'll leave 'e an' you'll be back home in time to have some fun yet.'

The driver, rejoicing at this un hoped diminution of his labours, soon reached the foot of a rough by-road that ascends to the Moor between the homesteads of Berry Down and Creber.

Kes Tor now arose on the left under its cap of flame, and the wayfarer, who carried no luggage, paid his fare, bid the other 'good night,' and then vanished into the darkness.

He passed between the sleeping farms, and only

watch-dogs barked out of the silence, for Gidleigh folks were all abroad that night. Pressing onwards, the native hurried to Scorhill, then crossed the Teign below Batworthy Farm, passed through the farmyard and so proceeded to the common beneath Kes Tor. He whistled as he went, then stopped a moment to listen. The first drone of music and remote laughter reached his ear. He hurried onwards, until a gleam lighted his face; then he passed through the ring of beasts, still staring fascinated around the fire; and finally he pushed among the people.

He stood revealed and there rose a sudden whisper among some who knew him, but whom he knew not. One or two uttered startled cries at this apparition, for all associated the new-comer with events and occurrences widely remote from the joy of the hour. How he came among them now, and what event made it possible for him to stand in their midst a free man, not the wisest could guess.

A name was carried from mouth to mouth, then shouted aloud, then greeted with a little cheer. It fell upon Mr. Blee's ear as he prepared to start homewards; and scarcely had the sound of it set him gasping when a big man grew out of the flame and shadow and stood before him with extended hand.

'Burnish it all! You! Be it Blanchard or the ghost of un?'

'The man hisself—so big as bull's beef, an' so free as thicky fire!' said Will.

Riotous joy sprang and bubbled in his voice. He gripped Billy's hand till the old man jumped and wriggled.

'Free! Gude God! Doan't tell me you've brawke loose—doan't 'e say that! Christ! if you haven't squashed my hand till theer's no feeling in it! Doan't 'e say you've runned away.'

'No such thing,' answered Will, now the centre of a little crowd. 'I'll tell 'e, sawls all, if you mind to hear. 'Tis this way: Queen Victoria, as have given of the best she've got wi' both hands to the high men of the land, so they tell me, caan't forget nought, even at such a time as this here. She've made gert additions to all manner o' men; an' to me, an' the likes o' me she've given what's more precious than bein' lords or dukes. I'm free—me an' all as runned from the ranks. The Sovereign Queen's let deserters go free, if you can credit it; an' that's how I stand here this minute.'

A buzz and hum with cheers and some laughter and congratulations followed Will's announcement. Then the people scattered to spread his story, and Mr. Blee spoke.

'Come you down home to wance. Ban't none up here as cares a rush 'bout 'e but me. But theer's a many anxious folks below. I comed up for auld sake's sake an' because ban't in reason to suppose I'll ever see another joy fire 'pon Kes Tor rock at my time o' life. But us'll go an' carry this rare news to Chagford an' the Barton.'

They faded from the red radius of the fire and left it slowly dying. Will helped Billy off rough ground to the road. Then he set off at a speed altogether beyond the old man's power, so Mr. Blee resorted to stratagem.

'Bate your pace; bate your pace; I caan't travel that gait an' talk same time. Yet theer's a power o' fine things I might tell 'e if you'd listen.'

''Tis hard to walk slow towards a mother an' wife like what mine be, after near a month from 'em; but let's have your news, Billy, an' doan't croak for God's sake. Say all's well wi' all.'

'I ban't no croaker, as you knaws. Happy, are 'e?—happy for wance? I suppose you'll say now, as you've said plenty times a'ready, that you'm to the tail

of your troubles for gude an' all—just in your auld silly fashion?'

'Not me, auld chap, never no more—so long as you'm alive! Ha, ha, ha—that's wan for you! Theer! if 't isn't gude to laugh again.'

'I be main glad as I've got no news to make 'e do anything else, though ban't often us can be prophets of gude nowadays. But if you've grawed a streak wiser of late, then theer's hope, even for a scatter-brain like you, the Lard bein' all-powerful. Not that jokes against such as me would please Him the better.'

'I've thought a lot in my time, Billy; an' I haven't done thinking yet. I've comed to reckon as I caan't do very well wi'out the world, though the world would fare easy enough wi'out me.'

Billy nodded.

'That's sense so far as it goes,' he admitted. 'Obedience be hard to the young; to the auld it comes natural; to me allus was easy as dirt from my youth up. Obedience to betters in heaven an' airth. But you—you with your born luck—never heard tell of nothin' like it 'tall. What's a fix to you? You goes in wan end an' walks out t' other, like a rabbit through a hedge. Theer you was—in such a tight pass as you might say neither God nor angels could get 'e free wi'out a Bible miracle, when, burnish it all! if the Jubilee Queen o' England doan't busy herself 'bout 'e!'

''Tis true as I'm walkin' by your side. I'd give a year o' my wages to knaw how I could shaw what I think about it.'

'You might thank her. 'Tis all as humble folks can do most times when Queens or Squires or the A'mighty Hisself spares a thought to better us. Us can awnly say "Thank you."'

There was a silence of some duration; then Billy again bid his companion moderate his pace.

'I'm forgetting all I've got to tell 'e, though I've news enough for a buke,' he said.

'How's Jan Grimbald fust place?'

'On his legs again an' out o' danger if the Lunnon Doctor knows anything. A hunderd guineas they say that chap have had! Your name was danced to a mad tune 'pon Grimbald's lips 'fore his senses comed back to us. Why for I caan't tell 'e. He've shook hands wi' Death for sartain while you was away.'

'An' mother, an' wife, an' Miller?'

'Your mother be well—a steadfast woman her be. Joy doan't lift her up, an' sorrow doan't crush her. Theer's gert wisdom in her way of life. 'Tis my awn for that matter. Then Miller—well, he'm grawin' auld an' doan't rate me quite so high as formerly—not that I judge anybody but myself. An' your missis—theer, if I haven't kept it for the last! 'Tis news four-an'-twenty hour old now an' they wrote to 'e essterday, but I lay you missed the letter awin' to me——'

'Get on!'

'Well, she've brought 'e a bwoy—so now you've got both sorts—bwoy an' cheel. An' all doin' well as can be, though wisht work for her thinkin' 'pon you the while.'

Will stood still and uttered a triumphant but inarticulate sound—half laugh, half sob, half thanksgiving. Then the man spoke, slow and deep.

'He shall go for a soldier!'

'Theer! Now I know 'tis Blanchard back an' no other! Hear me, will 'e, doan't plan no such uneven way of life for un.'

'By God he shall!'

The words came back over Will Blanchard's shoulder, for he was fast vanishing.

'Might have knawed he wouldn't walk along wi' me arter that,' thought Billy. Then he lifted up his voice

and bawled to the diminishing figure, already no more than a darker blot on the darkness of night.

‘For the Lard’s love go in quiet an’ gradual, or you’ll scare the life out of ’em all.’

And the answer came back.

‘I knaw, I knaw ; I ban’t the man to do a rash deed !’

Mr. Blee chuckled and plodded on through the night while Will strode far ahead.

Presently he stood beside the wicket of Mrs. Blanchard’s cottage and hesitated between two women. Despite circumstances there came no uncertain answer from the deepest wellsprings of him. He could not pass that gate just then. And so he stopped and turned and entered ; and she, his mother, sitting in thought alone, heard a footfall upon the great nightly silence—a sudden, familiar footfall that echoed to her heart the music it loved best.

THE END

Printed by T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to Her Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press



The English Library.

Price M. 1,60, or 2 Francs.

73.	My Jo, Jchn.	By HELEN MATHERS.	1 vol.
74.	Cecilia de Noël.	By the Author of "Mademoiselle Ixe."	1 vol.
75, 76.	The Little Minister.	By J. M. BARRIE.	2 vols.
77, 78.	The Railway Man and his Children.	By Mrs. OLIPHANT.	2 vols.
79.	The Doings of Raffles Haw.	By A. CONAN DOYLE.	1 vol.
80, 81.	Esther Vanhomrigh.	By MARGARET L. WOODS.	2 vols.
82.	Selected Poems.	By AUSTIN DOBSON.	1 vol.
83.	Stage-Land.	By JEROME K. JEROME.	1 vol.
84, 85.	The Baby's Grandmother.	By L. B. WALFORD.	2 vols.
86, 87.	The Adventures of Harry Richmond.	By GEORGE MEREDITH.	2 vols.
88, 89.	The Fair God.	By LEW WALLACE.	2 vols.
90.	Jupiter Lights.	By CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON.	1 vol.
91.	King Billy of Ballarat.	By MORLEY ROBERTS.	1 vol.
92.	Maisie Derriek.	By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.	1 vol.
93.	Jack's Father.	By W. E. NORRIS.	1 vol.
94.	A Romance of the Moors.	By MONA CAIRD.	1 vol.
95, 96.	The Marriage of Elinor.	By Mrs. OLIPHANT.	2 vols.
97.	Lady Patty.	By Mrs. HUNGERFORD.	1 vol.
98, 99.	Hovenden, V.C.	By F. MABEL ROBINSON.	2 vols.
100.	The Average Woman.	By WOLCOTT BALESTIER.	1 vol.
101.	He Went for a Soldier.	By JOHN STRANGE WINTER.	1 vol.
102.	Denzil Quarrier.	By GEORGE GISSING.	1 vol.
103, 104.	A Son of Hagar.	By HALL CAINE.	2 vols.
105.	Mammon.	By Mrs. ALEXANDER.	1 vol.
106.	Peter Ibbetson.	By GEORGE DU MAURIER.	1 vol.
107, 108.	A Social Departure.	By SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.	2 vols.
109.	Scamew Abbey.	By FLORENCE WARDEN.	1 vol.
110, 111.	The Shadow of a Crime.	By HALL CAINE.	2 vols.
112.	The Slave of the Lamp.	By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN.	1 vol.
113.	Granla.	By Hon. EMILY LAWLESS.	1 vol.
114.	There is no Death.	By FLORENCE MARRVAT.	1 vol.
115, 116.	Ralph Ryder of Brent.	By FLORENCE WARDEN.	2 vols.
117, 118.	Nor Wife Nor Maid.	By Mrs. HUNGERFORD.	2 vols.
119.	Margery of Quether.	By S. BARING-GOULD.	1 vol.
120.	Three in Norway.	By TWO OF THEM.	1 vol.
121, 122.	A New England Nun.	By MARY E. WILKINS.	2 vols.
123, 124.	The Soul of Lillith.	By MARIE CORELLI.	2 vols.
125, 126.	In the Roar of the Sea.	By S. BARING-GOULD.	2 vols.
127.	At the Red Glove.	By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.	1 vol.
128.	Barrack-Room Ballads.	By RUDYARD KIPLING.	1 vol.
129.	A Question of Taste.	By MAARTEN MAARTENS.	1 vol.
130.	Prince Bismarck.	By CHARLES LOWE, M.A.	1 vol.
131.	Avenged on Society.	By H. F. WOOD.	1 vol.
132.	A Voyage of Discovery.	By HAMILTON AIRD.	1 vol.
133.	Nada the Lilly.	By H. RIDER HAGGARD.	1 vol.
134.	Notes for the Nile.	By H. D. RAWNSLEY.	1 vol.

Continued on the back of cover.

The English Library

Price M. 1,60, or 2 Francs.

135.	The Lesson of the Master.	By HENRY JAMES.	1 vol.
136.	The Travelling Companions.	By F. ANSTEY.	1 vol.
137, 138.	A Queen of Curds and Cream.	By DOROTHEA GERARD.	2 vols.
139, 140.	Anne.	By CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON.	2 vols.
141.	Cricket.	By W. G. GRACE.	1 vol.
142, 143.	The Nobler Sex.	By FLORENCE MARRYAT.	2 vols.
144, 145.	The Head of the Firm.	By Mrs. RIDDELL.	2 vols.
146.	The Tower of Taddeo.	By OUIDA.	1 vol.
147.	A Shock to Society.	By FLORENCE WARDEN.	1 vol.
148, 149.	A Fatal Silence.	By FLORENCE MARRYAT.	2 vols.
150.	The Naulahka.	By RUDYARD KIPLING and WOLCOTT BALESTIER.	1 vol.
151, 152.	The Wrecker.	By R. L. STEVENSON and LLOYD OSBOURNE.	2 vols.
153, 154.	An Englishman in Paris.		2 vols.
155.	Come Live with Me and be My Love.	By ROBERT BUCHANAN.	1 vol.
156, 157.	The Cuckoo in the Nest.	By Mrs. OLIPHANT.	2 vols.
158.	The Diary of a Nobody.	By GEORGE and WEEDON GROSSMITH.	1 vol.
159.	Mysteries and Adventures.	By A. CONAN DOYLE.	1 vol.
160.	A Knight of the White Feather.	By TASMA.	1 vol.
161, 162.	The Human Law.	By B. L. FARJEON.	2 vols.
163.	Inconsequent Lives.	By J. H. PEARCE.	1 vol.
164, 165.	The Ivory Gate.	By WALTER BESANT.	2 vols.
166.	Flving Visits.	By HARRY FURNISS.	1 vol.
167.	The Jungle Book.	By RUDYARD KIPLING.	1 vol.
168.	Diana Trelawny.	By Mrs. OLIPHANT.	1 vol.
169.	His Grace.	By W. E. NORRIS.	1 vol.
170.	Nurse Elisia.	By G. MANVILLE FENN.	1 vol.
171, 172.	The Victorian Age of English Literature.	By Mrs. OLIPHANT.	2 vols.
173.	Irish Idylls.	By JANE BARLOW.	1 vol.
174, 175.	London.	By WALTER BESANT.	2 vols.
176.	Berris.	By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.	1 vol.
177.	The One Good Guest.	By L. B. WALFORD.	1 vol.
178, 179.	Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp.	By Major F. R. WINGATE, R.A.	2 vols.
180.	The O'Connors of Ballinahinch.	By Mrs. HUNGERFORD.	1 vol.
181.	Pierre and His People.	By GILBERT PARKER.	1 vol.
182.	An Artist in Crime.	By RODRIGUES OTTOLENGUI.	1 vol.
183, 184.	A Passage through Bohemia.	By FLORENCE WARDEN.	2 vols.
185.	The Prisoner of Zenda.	By ANTHONY HOPE.	1 vol.
186.	The Ebb-Tide.	By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON and LLOYD OSBOURNE.	1 vol.
187, 188.	The Last Sentence.	By MAXWELL GRAY.	2 vols.
189.	Many Inventions.	By RUDYARD KIPLING.	1 vol.
196, 197.	The Heavenly Twins.	By SARAH GRAND.	2 vols.
198, 199.	Esther Waters.	By GEORGE MOORE.	2 vols.
200.	The Gadfly.	By E. L. VOYNICH.	1 vol.
201.	The Dull Miss Archinard.	By A. D. SEDGWICK.	1 vol.
202.	By Stroke of Sword.	By ANDREW BALFOUR.	1 vol.
203.	Byeways.	By ROBERT HICHENS.	1 vol.
204, 205.	Children of the Mist.	By EDEN PHILLPOTTS.	2 vols.

Wholesale Agents of The English Library •

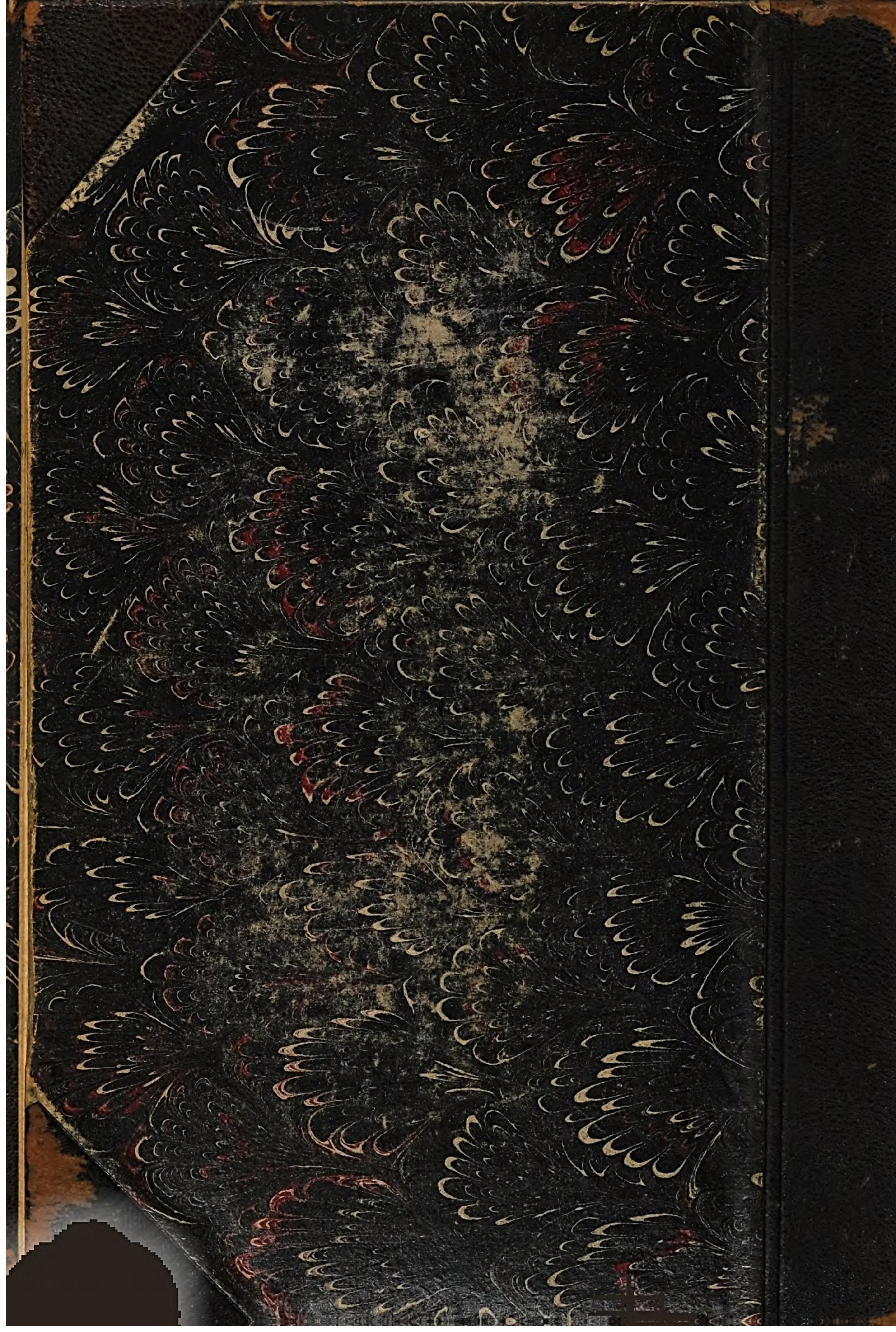
LEIPZIG, BERLIN, VIENNA—F. A. BROCKHAUS.

PARIS—HACHETTE ET CIE.

AND SOLD BY EVERY BOOKSELLER ON THE CONTINENT.

Price M. 1,60, or 2 Francs.

FRITZ GÄHR Buchbind
F. X. Beer Nachfolger
MÜNCHEN
Löwengrube 17.



Phillpotts, Eden,

Children of the Mist A Novel In 2 Volumes

Bd.: 2

1899

P.o.angl. 276 sf-2

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb12036887-3